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On the morning of July 3, I typed the words "Diogo Jota" into the Getty Images search bar. The most recent results showed the 28-year-old celebrating the Nations League triumph with his Portugal team-mates. With a bit more scrolling, he was parading the Premier League trophy through the streets of Liverpool. Filtering the search to "entertainment" showed him getting married to Rute Cardoso, the mother of his three children. Just 11 days after the wedding, he was killed in a car crash with his brother Andre Silva; a stark reminder that life can be short and cruel, and that football is secondary. This issue is dedicated to Diogo Jose Teixeira da Silva.

Jamie Evans, Managing Editor

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Henry WINTER
THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Football must never forget Diogo Jota

Diogo Jota remembered... Liverpool players bow their heads in silence

In the modern era when seasons seem to blur into one another, the FA Community Shield still stands out as a beacon lighting up the launch of a new campaign of English football. Contested since 1908, the annual charity fund-raiser between title winners and FA Cup holders carries even more significance on August 10.

The eyes of the world focus on Wembley as Liverpool and Crystal Palace deliver an emotional salute to Diogo Jota and his brother Andre Silva who tragically died in a car crash in Zamora, north-western Spain, on July 3. The FA plans a special tribute, joining players and 90,000 fans in a powerful show of love and remembrance. The brothers will never be forgotten.

And nor will their families. They need supporting. Heartache at losing a loved one never truly ends. The pain may dull over time, but never fully disappears. When somebody is loved so much, the sense of loss is inevitably so great. It is often in the months that follow sudden bereavement when the darkness shows no sign of easing and reality grips even harder. That is why the Community Shield matters so much this year.

It is vital that Jota's widow, Rute, and their three children always know how loved and admired he was at Liverpool and throughout the game: for the way that he played, with passion, intelligence and a smile; and for his qualities as a man, humble and fun, loyal to his friends and a loving father, husband and son.

The loss of Jota and Silva has been felt so widely, and mourned so deeply, because they were such good people, as well as good at their chosen profession, exceptionally so in Jota's case. Story after story emerged of their kindness to others, children poorly in hospital, children struggling in school. Jota stood up for people. He stood up for what is right. Liverpool fans will also never forget his response to Leicester City fans when hearing the "feed the Scousers" chant at Anfield in 2021. After scoring, he ran to the away end and celebrated wildly in

Tribute... Preston captain Ben Whiteman lays a wreath in front of the Liverpool supporters

You'll Never Walk Alone... Jota will forever be Liverpool's number 20

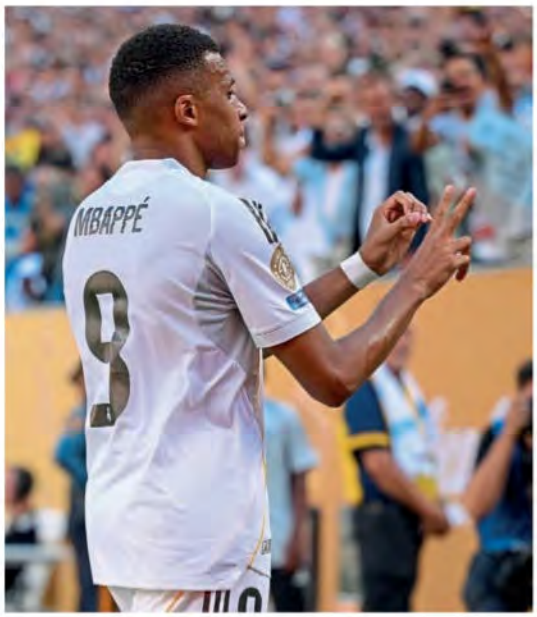
front of Leicester supporters, giving it large back to them. Liverpool fans loved that Jota fought for them, and fought for the quality of humanity. That moment summed Jota up. It's not only the world of football that has lost two fine role models. The whole world has.

Over the years to come, when the broken-hearted Rute has to try again to explain tenderly to the children why their father isn't coming home, the family can at least find some solace amidst the despair that Liverpool will always be there for them. Wembley will confirm that. Liverpool always show their strength and family nature in traumatic times like these, not only in the days after the tragedy, but full and unconditional support forever. Their opponents at Wembley, Palace, are a compassionate club. Palace's chairman, Steve Parish, invariably does the right thing. Club, squad and support will stand shoulder to shoulder with Liverpool at Wembley in remembering Jota and Silva. Wolverhampton Wanderers too, where Jota first played in England, will always be there for the families, many miles away but always close.

As Jota's children make their journey in life, searching for light to guide the way through the darkness, they can take some comfort by this awareness of the love out there for their father. They will listen to the Liverpool and Wolves fans who sing his name forever more. They will remember the shrine that spread outside Anfield.

They will take reassurance from the powerful way that Jota's team-mate and friend, Andy Robertson, so eloquently articulated the love of the team for their number 20. The Liverpool legend, John Aldridge, was interviewed next to the field of flowers, his voice breaking as he spoke of Jota's song going round in his head. Aldridge echoed the anguish of all Liverpool players, past and present, at what had befallen Jota. Their love and support were conveyed not only in words and tone but visually, too. Both wore black suits as they bore the wreaths: Robertson at the funeral, Aldridge at Anfield.

Jota's family can recall how respect flowed from all over, and always will. Goalscorers at summer tournaments across the world did Jota's goal celebrations. Paris Saint-Germain's Ousmane Dembele and Goncalo Ramos sat cross-legged and did the video-game controller celebration. Jota's number 20 was honoured. Kylian Mbappe stood in front of a camera and held up two fingers of his right hand and made a zero with his left. Across Merseyside, children painted pictures of Jota and left them amongst the tributes outside Anfield. Oasis played *"Live Forever"* with a backdrop of Jota's shirt. Brothers mourning brothers.



Dedication...Kylian Mbappe indicates the number 20 after scoring for Real Madrid at the Club World Cup

Diogo Jota's family can recall how respect flowed from all over, and always will

And more. Jota's family can reflect on photos of West Ham players and staff gathering around the centre-circle of their main training pitch on the first day of pre-season, bowing their heads in a minute's silence in memory of the brothers. Brentford players stood in a long line on their main pitch, facing the pavilion. Everyone else at the training ground, kit men to kitchen and medical staff, congregated outside, facing the players. Brentford then posted a black-and-white picture of the sombre scene. And Wolves too paid tribute to their former star, with coaching staff and players laying flowers outside Molineux.

Jota and Silva were also commemorated during Liverpool's pre-season friendly against Preston. Lilywhites captain Ben Whiteman laid a wreath in front of the away supporters before a full-stadium rendition of *"You'll Never Walk Alone"*. The crowd then sang Jota's song in the 20th minute and Darwin Nunez performed two of Jota's goal celebrations. The players' full-time applause while facing the Liverpool fans singing for a full five minutes was particularly poignant.

Even a month on from the passing of Diogo Jota and Andre Silva, football continues to mourn them, and it always will. It's so important that their bereft families remain aware of that. Wembley will be a full house and in full voice in remembering them on August 10, and reminding their families that English football will always be there for them. RIP.

Poignant...Liverpool's players and coaching staff stand and applaud their fans at the final whistle to remember Diogo Jota

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

What could have been

Saudi Arabia have achieved the kind of influence over football that China once aspired for

No escaping Saudi Arabia in world football: the only team to defeat Argentina at the last World Cup, buying into the English Premier League via Newcastle United, persuading FIFA president Gianni Infantino to hand them hosting rights for the 2034 World Cup, and helpfully financing his Club World Cup escapade via funding DAZN after the European TV snub.

Yet previously this had all been China's for the taking.

One of the sports-politics fascinations of the century has been the rise and fall of their ambitions in the world of football, the most effective weapon for promoting state identity on a populist international stage.

Remember 2002 when China finally made their World Cup debut in Japan and South Korea (they lost all three matches – to Brazil, Costa Rica and Turkey – and failed to score even once, but it was a start)? Remember 2015 when President Xi Jinping came out as a fan of Manchester United? Remember 2017 when Shanghai SIPG led a big-money transfer slalom in the country's domestic league by splashing £60 million on Chelsea's Oscar? Remember 2019 when Infantino revealed plans to launch his expanded Club World Cup in China? Remember all the PR companies and academics predicting a Chinese takeover of world football? Remember confident talk of a World Cup being hosted in China in 2034?

This was the dream now in tatters, leaving a free hit for Saudi Arabia. What went wrong? Or was it always an own goal waiting to happen?

Once upon a time, China was as much an outlier on the football stage as the United States once was. Rational reasons aplenty: China's tradition of Confucian-value sports such as martial arts, table tennis and badminton with a focus on individual discipline; an intense school-years focus on academic achievement rather than physical education; plus a Soviet-style sports model which prioritised Olympic medal status via individualistic disciplines (much like East Germany).

Splurge...Carlos Tevez was the world's highest-paid player when he joined Shanghai Shenhua in 2017

Football, imported via ports such as Shanghai, Hong Kong and Canton (now Guangzhou), was not so easy to control. A putative students' national team had made its debut in 1913, FIFA membership was secured in 1931 and nine gold medals were won at the Far East Games before a Chinese team sailed 9,000 miles to the 1936 Berlin Olympics – and were immediately knocked out 2-0 by Great Britain.

The convulsive years of the Second World War then revolution brought isolation with the status dispute with Taiwan resolved only after "ping-pong diplomacy" in the early 1970s. FIFA found its own way through the linguistic tangle under its former president Joao Havelange in 1979, but football remained decidedly a second-class sport. Hence a lack of oversight permitting domestic competitions riddled with corruption and administrative incompetence.

Ultimately, domestic winds of political and commercial pragmatism provided a platform to create the Chinese Super League in 2004. By 2012, the explosion of investment was underway as new commercial and property conglomerates leapt

on the bandwagon with alacrity.

Guangzhou Evergrande won the Asian Champions League in 2013 and 2015. The new clubs' big-splash imports included Carlos Tevez (then the best-paid player in the world on a reported £615,000-a-week), Hulk, Didier Drogba, Nicolas Anelka and Jackson Martinez. Coaches, too: Sven-Goran Eriksson, Marcello Lippi, Luiz Felipe Scolari, Felix Magath, Andre Villas-Boas, Fabio Cannavaro and Manuel Pellegrini. Antonio Conte, then Chelsea manager, warned: "The Chinese market is a danger for all of us. Not only for Chelsea, but all the teams in the world."

the domestic property market collapsed.

Domestically, a string of clubs, including Guangzhou, would have their professional registrations cancelled; at political level football lost its allure. Hosting rights for the 2023 Asian Cup were ceded to Qatar.

Perfect timing for Saudi Arabia. Infantino had already switched focus to the Middle East Kingdom back in 2018 when he sat in self-satisfied splendour alongside Vladimir Putin and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the opening match of the World Cup in Russia.

China's football dream is now in tatters, leaving a free hit for Saudi Arabia. What went wrong? Or was it always an own goal waiting to happen?

The idyll did not endure. In 2018 politicians, alarmed by a rampant commercialism beyond their control, imposed a 100 per cent transfer tax on overseas players. The excuse was an unfulfilled intention to invest in youth football, which promised 20,000 training academies and 70,000 pitches with 50 million children and adults playing the game. All too soon, the dream faded. The foreign player quota was cut from four to three per club per match and the veteran imports soon started complaining to FIFA about non-payment of their always-extravagant wages.

Simultaneously, gambling in the black markets brought new tales of bribery and corruption. Notably, ex-national team head coach Li Tie, the former Everton and China midfielder, was among those charged; he would eventually be sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Then came the COVID pandemic, exploding out of China itself. There was no way back. The capital flight investment into major European clubs such as Italy's Internazionale (Suning) and Milan (Li Yonghong's Sino-Europe Sports) was curtailed;

China had proved too complex for its own good: a nation of 1.4 billion with 113 cities of more than one million people. Compare that with Saudi Arabia's comparatively more contained 33 million and five cities at one million-plus; and compare hundreds of thousands of state-owned enterprises of different strategic importance with Saudi's PIF-style, mega-earning oil sector.

As for the football itself, China's meagre World Cup record was overshadowed by Saudi Arabia's six appearances at the finals, not to mention three Asian titles, a national league since the mid-1970s and professionalism since 2007 on top of an early investment in foreign coaching expertise.

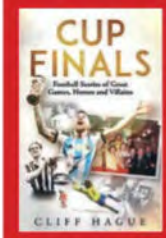
Not that anything out on the pitch is ever guaranteed. China, despite the expansion of the 2026 World Cup finals, will not be there, killed off already in Asian qualifying. Saudi themselves scrambled into the play-offs (ahead of China) but will fancy their chances as hosts of one of October's two mini-leagues of three nations.

So, when it came to sportwashing through football, the Saudis have plenty to enhance; China, when it comes to soft power promotion no longer has the will or the means. China had sought to build its castle on a private sector shortcut; turns out that the house built on desert sand had the more valid foundations.

Still, at least China should qualify for the 2030 World Cup finals – if CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez succeeds in persuading Infantino to expand the anniversary tournament to 64 teams. Expect China to vote for that one.

Dream over...China have failed to make the 2026 World Cup after crashing out in Asia's qualifiers

BOOKS THIS MONTH



CUP FINALS
By Cliff Hague (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

Cup Finals: Football Stories of Great Games, Heroes and Villains dives into the drama of football's most iconic finals – from the World Cup to the Scottish Junior Cup. This book captures the ecstasy and agony of the beautiful game's biggest stages, exploring the legends, underdogs and controversies that define them. In an era of corporate football, *Cup Finals* asks: who really owns the game?

THE ENGLISH GAME
By Ivan Ambrosio (Pitch Publishing, £14.99)

The English Game: A Journey of Discovery in the Home of Football sees coach Ivan Ambrosio embark on a heartfelt journey through England's footballing heartlands. Told through 52 vivid stories, this book blends personal discovery with club and stadium lore, offering a fresh, outsider's perspective on the soul of English football. Ivan's journey also led him to coaching roles at Fulham and Crystal Palace's academies.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Keep ball

How Chelsea dethroned Champions League winners PSG

For a long time it seemed that two themes would dominate discussion of the Club World Cup: the ongoing domination of Paris Saint-Germain, and the weather. The final, in which Chelsea beat PSG 3-0, caused things to be seen in a rather different light. This was a tournament in which Cole Palmer underlined his status as a genuine global star, but also one that confirmed the acumen of Blues head coach Enzo Maresca.

With the exception of their group game against Botafogo, when they rested several key players, PSG had seemed dominant before that final, as they have since January. Although their Total Football/Barcelona heritage is clear, they are a deviation from the Guardiola model of the game, taking more risks with attacking dribblers. Even Guardiola last season admitted that might be a development on his habitual caution.

The obvious improvement from previous iterations of PSG was the work-rate of the front three: Desire Doue, Ousmane Dembele and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia are all hard runners, pressing in a way PSG simply couldn't when they had Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe up front. Up to the semi-final, they made 31 tackles and interceptions between them; against Chelsea, they mustered just one.

There are two potential explanations for that, and both may be partially true: that Chelsea played an extremely canny game in avoiding being pressed, and that PSG were exhausted. They played in the second semi-final. Although they effectively had that game, against Real Madrid, wrapped up within half an hour and although they didn't need to travel on to the final, there is a clear advantage to the extra 24 hours of rest afforded by playing in the first semi-final, and perhaps particularly so in the high heat and humidity of New Jersey in July.

The conditions made a clear difference to the tournament. It's not that there was no pressing at all, rather than it was confined to certain periods of play, while there were several spells in which it felt both sides had come to a tacit agreement to take a breather. Cooling breaks are clearly necessary, but they also offer an opportunity for managers to offer additional instruction – as, for instance, Louis van Gaal did in the World Cup in 2014 when the Netherlands beat Costa Rica on penalties in the quarter-final.

Delays for lightning also became a major feature and probably require some thought before next summer's World Cup. Safety, clearly, has to be paramount, but it's also not good for players to have to start to try playing again, the lactic acid weighing down their limbs, a couple of hours after they finished. Playing as many high-risk games in indoor stadiums would seem an obvious solution.

Much is made, rightly, about the astonishing influence of the Barcelona of the late '90s. Van Gaal was coach, Jose Mourinho was an assistant and Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique were in midfield. The four have gone on to have remarkable success, winning eight Champions Leagues between them and defining the tactical parameters of the modern game.

> This was a notable victory for the old, possession-protecting version of Guardiola's football

Golden Ball...Cole Palmer celebrates scoring Chelsea's second goal in the Club World Cup final

Mastermind...Enzo Maresca deserves praise for how he set his team up

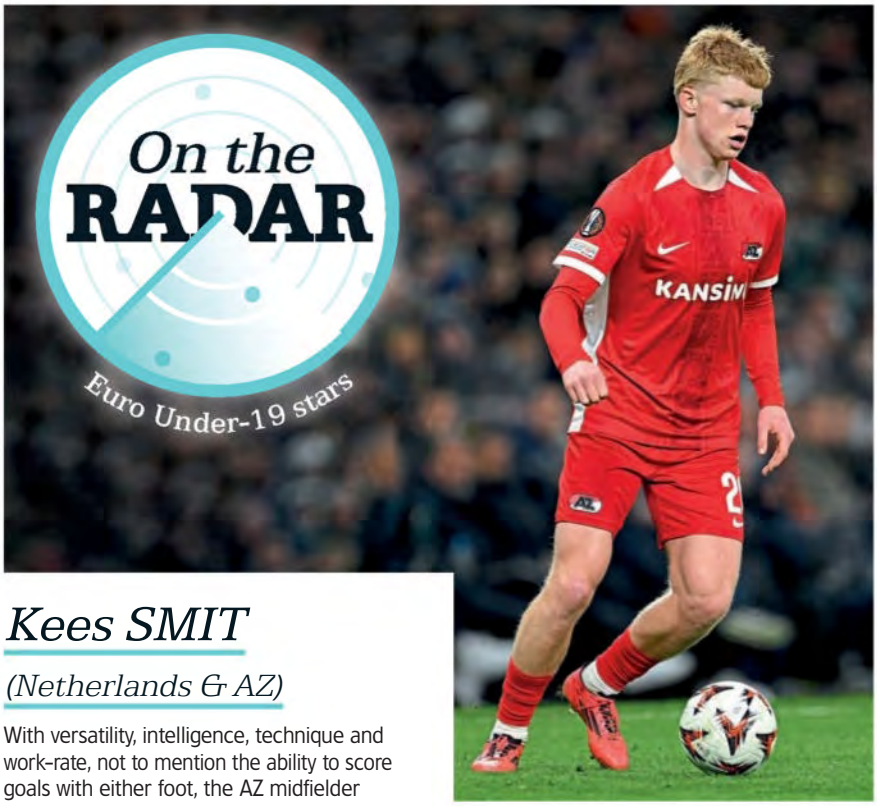
But as Barcelona were on their way to retaining the league title under Van Gaal in 1998-99, another two future coaches met in an FA Cup third-round tie at Dean Court: Maresca and Eddie Howe, who scored the winner as Bournemouth shocked West Brom. They are the only two managers to lead teams to three-goal victories over Luis Enrique's PSG.

While Newcastle benefited in the 2023-24 Champions League group phase from PSG's baffling 4-2-4 formation that left them wide open in midfield, Chelsea were playing the fully formed PSG, with the hard-working, high-pressing 4-3-3 that for six months had seemed all but invincible. But Maresca successfully stifled the attacking sallies of Achraf Hakimi by using Pedro Neto effectively as a wing-back out of possession, and managed repeatedly in the first half to bypass Fabian Ruiz to isolate Nuno Mendes.

Maresca has often been criticised for the supposed negativity of his approach, but given how PSG swept aside Liverpool, Aston Villa and Arsenal in the Champions League knockouts, that is a notable achievement. This was a notable victory for the old, possession-protecting version of Guardiola's football. Chelsea sat deep and denied PSG any space to run at them, while PSG's attempts to press themselves rendered them vulnerable, thanks in part to the accuracy with which Robert Sanchez kept hitting the inside-right channel, making Nuno Mendes fear balls in behind him.

It was one such ball that led to the opening goal as Malo Gusto got behind him, but it was PSG's efforts to avoid such an opening recurring that led to the second and third goals as a retreating defence gave Palmer room in which to operate, space he accepted gratefully to score his second and then set up the third.

After a few months in which the direction of travel appeared to be heading towards a more runner-oriented vision of the game, Chelsea and Maresca showed there is still life in the possession-based positional game.



Kees SMIT

(Netherlands & AZ)

With versatility, intelligence, technique and work-rate, not to mention the ability to score goals with either foot, the AZ midfielder looks like a young Kevin De Bruyne.

Such comparisons could be a burden for a 19-year-old to carry. However, at no point did he seem fazed during the 2025 European Under-19 Championship, instrumental as the *Oranje* clinched their first title at this level. While all four of his goals were sweetly-struck beauties, the one he netted versus England in the group phase was extra special, a wondrous left-footed curler from the most improbable of angles.

He does make a habit of the other-worldly, scoring from the centre-circle for AZ in a UEFA Youth League last-16 win over Barcelona in 2022-23. Fresh from a breakout Eredivisie season with the AZ pros, the young Dutch midfielder looks set for a big future.

Said EL MALA
(Germany & Cologne)
Just as devastating wide on the left as through the middle, El Mala's dribbling ability, strength in one-on-one situations and deadly finishing made him Germany's not-so-secret attacking weapon as they reached the semi-finals.

Luca SZIMIONAS
(Romania & Hellas Verona)
An anchorman of vision and efficiency, invariably in the right position; three seasons in Verona's youth system clearly has worked wonders for the defensive midfielder's tactical awareness. He shone as the hosts also made the last four.

Ethan WHEATLEY
(England & Manchester United)
The 19-year-old striker failed to make an impact during a recent loan spell with English League Two side Walsall, but led the line with bravura, maturity and confidence in the two games he started for England at the Euros.

Jon MARTIN
(Spain & Real Sociedad)
After establishing himself in *La Real's* first team towards the end of last season, this aerially-dominant centre-back with great anticipation proved equally effective for Euro runners-up Spain, making the Team of the Tournament.

Nick Bidwell

"For us as a club, the sense of shock is absolute. Diogo was not just our player. He was a loved one to all of us. He was a team-mate, a colleague, a workmate and in all of those roles he was very special"

Liverpool manager Arne Slot pays tribute to Diogo Jota

OBITUARIES

Diogo JOTA
(1996-2025)
Portugal forward Diogo Jose Teixeira da Silva died in a car crash in Spain along with his brother Andre Silva. He was travelling back to Liverpool for pre-season training. Jota had scored 65 goals in 182 games for Liverpool and 14 in 49 appearances for Portugal with whom he won the UEFA Nations League in June.

Before joining Liverpool in 2020, he played for Pacos de Ferreira, Atletico Madrid, Porto and Wolverhampton Wanderers. Jota, with Liverpool, won the Premier League, FA Cup and two League Cups. Manager Arne Slot and team-mates, including captain Virgil van Dijk and close friend Andy Robertson, attended the joint funeral in Gondomar, Portugal. The last time they saw Jota had been two weeks earlier at his wedding to Rute Cardoso, his childhood sweetheart and mother of their three children.

Liverpool set up a book of condolence at Anfield and an online version "accessible to fans across the globe". Tributes from around the world included words of condolence from the Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer.

Typical of players' reaction were the words of Mohamed Salah. He said: "I never thought there would be something that would frighten me of going back to Liverpool after the break. Team-mates come and go but not like this. It's going to be extremely difficult to accept that Diogo won't be there when we go back."

Full tribute on page 24.

Memories...Diogo Jota holds aloft the League Cup trophy at Wembley in 2022

Andre SILVA
(2000-2025)
Andre Filipe Teixeira da Silva was the younger brother of Diogo Jota, with whom he died in a car crash in Spain. Winger or attacking midfielder who started with his local club in the town of Gondomar. Played in the youth sections of Porto, Pacos de Ferreira, Famalicao and Boavista, before transferring in 2023 to second-tier Penafiel.

Juan Manuel ALVAREZ
(1948-2025)
Mexican Olympic Games defender in Munich in 1972, who was nicknamed "*El Capi*" and won six senior caps. Played his club football for Atletico Espanol and Tecos UAG then coached Angeles de Puebla, Veracruz, Toluca, Correcaminos, and Deportivo Saprissa in Costa Rica. Alvarez, thanks to the goals of Emilio Butragueno, led Celaya to the league play-off final where they lost to Necaxa.

Rinus ISRAEL
(1942-2025)
Marinus David "Rinus" Israel made his professional football debut with DWS, winning the Dutch championship in 1963-64 just one season after the Amsterdam club had been promoted to the Eredivisie.

In 1966, Israel joined Feyenoord in a record 450,000 guilders transfer, developing into a rock-solid defender and forming a feared duo with Theo Laseroms. Israel himself was nicknamed "Iron Rinus." In 1970, he captained the first Dutch club ever to win the European Cup and scored in the 2-1 victory over Celtic. Israel was subsequently voted Dutch Footballer of the Year. His eight years in Rotterdam also brought him success, once each in the UEFA Cup

Remembered...Andre Silva and Diogo Jota together at Porto

"Diogo joined us in 2020, he won us number 20, and he wore – with honour, distinction and affection – the number 20. As far as Liverpool FC is concerned, he will be forever our number 20"

FSG CEO of Football Michael Edwards announces Liverpool's No.20 shirt will be retired across all levels in honour of Diogo Jota

and Intercontinental Cup plus three Dutch titles and one domestic cup.

After his time at Feyenoord, Israel played for Excelsior and PEC Zwolle, where his playing career ended in 1982 at the age of 40. He scored three goals in 47 internationals between 1964 and 1974, appearing at the 1974 World Cup in West Germany.

His coaching career brought him back to Feyenoord for two years then on to PAOK Salonika, Ghana and several posts in the United Arab Emirates, where he won the league with Al Wahda.

Gordon JAGO
(1932–2025)
Jago, a reliable defender with Charlton Athletic in the 1950s and later manager of QPR and Millwall, was among the British expat pioneers of the United States soccer relaunch in the late 1960s and 1970s. He coached Tampa Bay Rowdies and Dallas Sidekicks, and was later head of the World Indoor Soccer League and executive director of the Dallas Cup from 2002 to 2012. Jago was awarded an MBE in 2006.

Player turned coach...Gordon Jago

Miguel Angel LOPEZ
(1942–2025)
Argentina defender who was a defensive pillar for Independiente in the 1970s, famously winning four Copas Libertadores, three Copas Interamericana and the 1973 Intercontinental Cup against Juventus. Later he was a Colombian champion with Atletico Nacional. As a coach, he notably guided the teenage steps of Diego Maradona at Argentinos Juniors and helped Club America win the 1984–85 Mexican championship.

Antonio MORATO
(1937–2025)
Portugal defender whose one and only cap was in a shock 4–2 World Cup qualifying defeat by Luxembourg in October 1961. That defeat, in which Eusebio also made his debut, opened the door for England to top the group and reach the finals in Chile. Morato played over 100 times for Sporting between 1956 and 1963. His son, also Antonio, followed in his footsteps with Portugal and Sporting in the 1980s.

Adolfo OLIVARES
(1940–2025)
Universidad de Chile forward whose seven goals in 15 games for the national team in 1968–69 were insufficient to take them to the World Cup finals in Mexico. Also played for Huachipato and Santiago Morning.

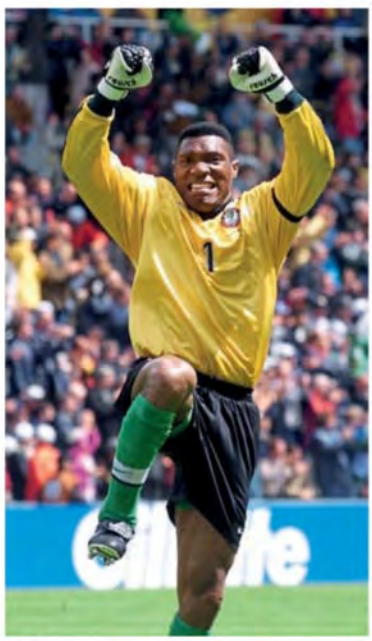
Alan PEACOCK
(1937–2025)
Tall, intelligent centre-forward whose career was wrecked by injury. Peacock made his name initially as inside-left partner alongside Brian Clough with Middlesbrough in the second division in the late 1950s. They amassed 262 goals in five years, scoring goals as prolifically as a suspect defence conceded them. Peacock led England's attack at the 1962 World Cup in Chile then, after scoring 141 goals in 238 games for Boro, joined Leeds in 1964 for £55,000. Knee trouble ruined his hopes of playing at the 1966 World Cup and forced his premature retirement only two years later.

Prolific...Peacock played alongside Brian Clough at Middlesbrough in the 1950s and early 1960s

Lajos SATMAREANU
(1944–2025)
Romanian defender who won the league once and cup five times with Steaua Bucharest. Played in all 90 minutes of Romania's three matches at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.

Jacques VERGNES
(1948–2025)
France forward who scored in his one and only international game, against Norway, in 1971. Scored goals wherever he went on a career journey all around the domestic league with Montpellier, Red Star, Nimes, Bastia, Reims, Laval, Strasbourg, Bordeaux and finally back to Montpellier.

Peter RUFAI
(1963–2025)
Rufai played 65 times for Nigeria and was the Super Eagles' goalkeeper at the 1994 and 1998 World Cups, and also when they won the 1994 Africa Cup of Nations. He played in the AFCON final in 1988 when Nigeria lost to Cameroon and at the 1984 tournament as well. Domestically, "*Dodo Mayana*" made his name with Stationery Stores of Lagos then moved on to clubs in Benin, Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.



Goalkeeping legend...Nigeria custodian Peter Rufai

Words by Keir Radnedge & Mark Gleeson

"Olympique Lyonnais welcomes the decision to keep the club in Ligue 1. OL thanks the appeal committee for having recognised the ambition of the club's new management"

The French club release a statement after winning their appeal against relegation, reversing the earlier decision of the DNCG

12 MOVES *you might have missed...*

TRANSFERS ★ LOANS ★ SACKINGS ★ HIRINGS ★ SWITCHES ★ RETIREMENTS

Aaron RAMSEY

After departing boyhood club Cardiff City, where he ended last season as caretaker coach, the iconic Wales midfielder switched to Mexican side **Pumas UNAM** on a free transfer.

Paul POGBA

The World Cup-winning midfielder returned to competitive football by signing a two-year deal at **Monaco**. The Ligue 1 club also signed Ansu Fati on loan from Barcelona.

Tammy ABRAHAM

The 27-year-old striker moved on loan to **Besiktas**, with the switch to be made permanent if certain conditions are met. He spent last season on loan at Milan from Roma.

Francesco FARIOLI

Porto hired Farioli as their new head coach, replacing Argentine Martin Anselmi. The 36-year-old Italian, who last season managed Ajax, signed a two-year contract.

Davide ANCELOTTI

Carlo Ancelotti's son took the reins at **Botafogo**, replacing Renato Paiva. It is the 36-year-old's first coaching job, having previously assisted his father since 2016.

Andy CARROLL

Ex-Newcastle, Liverpool and West Ham United striker Carroll joined English sixth-tier club **Dagenham & Redbridge** on a free transfer after leaving Bordeaux in June.

Alexandre LACAZETTE

The former Lyon and Arsenal striker signed for **NEOM** upon their first appearance in the Saudi League's top flight. Poland goalkeeper Marcin Bulka has also joined from Nice.

Salomon RONDON

Venezuela's record scorer moved to La Liga new boys **Real Oviedo** on loan from Pachuca. The 35-year-old reunites with Santi Cazorla after they played together at Malaga.

Alexandre LAFITTE

Fresh off winning the Ivorian title with Stade Abidjan, the 28-year-old joined South Africa's **Marumo Gallants** and becomes the youngest coach in Premier Soccer League history.

Jonathan SILVA

The former Estudiantes, Sporting, Boca Juniors, Leganes and Getafe left-back joined Malaysian champions **Johor Darul Ta'zim**, who recently appointed Xisco Munoz as manager.

Stefano PIOLI

Serie A outfit **Fiorentina** re-hired journeyman manager Stefano Pioli as their head coach after he spent less than a year in charge of Saudi Pro League side Al Nassr.

Jonathan DAVID

David left Lille for **Juventus**, with Olivier Giroud arriving from LAFC to replace him. More free transfers saw Edin Dzeko move to Fiorentina and Jordan Henderson join Brentford.

"Football...you gave me victories, defeats, lessons and friends for life. You gave me a unique path and a thousand stories to tell. Now it is time to enjoy you from another perspective"

Former Croatia, Barcelona and Sevilla midfielder Ivan Rakitic announces his retirement

SUMMER 2025 TRANSFER WINDOW

A selection of done deals since the summer transfer window re-opened in mid-June...

£60m	**JOAO PEDRO**	*(Brighton & Hove Albion, Eng to Chelsea, Eng)*
£60m	**Martin ZUBIMENDI**	*(Real Sociedad, Spa to Arsenal, Eng)*
£55m	**Anthony ELANGA**	*(Nottingham Forest, Eng to Newcastle United, Eng)*
£55m	**Mohammed KUDUS**	*(West Ham United, Eng to Tottenham Hotspur, Eng)*
£48.5m	**Jamie GITTENS**	*(Borussia Dortmund, Ger to Chelsea, Eng)*
£48.5m	**Noni MADUEKE**	*(Chelsea, Eng to Arsenal, Eng)*
£43.4m	**Alvaro CARRERAS**	*(Benfica, Por to Real Madrid, Spa)*
£40m	**Milos KERKEZ**	*(Bournemouth, Eng to Liverpool, Eng)*
£39m	**Alex BAENA**	*(Villarreal, Spa to Atletico Madrid, Spa)*
£35m	**Jarell QUANSAH**	*(Liverpool, Eng to Bayer Leverkusen, Ger)*
£30m	**Habib DIARRA**	*(Strasbourg, Fra to Sunderland, Eng)*
£30m	**Mathys TEL**	*(Bayern Munich, Ger to Tottenham Hotspur, Eng)**
£30m	**Malik TILLMAN**	*(PSV, Ned to Bayer Leverkusen, Ger)*
£27m	**Thierno BARRY**	*(Villarreal, Spa to Everton, Eng)*
£26m	**Johnny CARDOSO**	*(Real Betis, Spa to Atletico Madrid, Spa)*
£25m	**Djordje PETROVIC**	*(Chelsea, Eng to Bournemouth, Eng)*
£23m	**Jorgen STRAND LARSEN**	*(Celta Vigo, Spa to Wolves, Eng)**
£22m	**El Hadji Malick DIOUF**	*(Slavia Prague, Cze to West Ham United, Eng)*
£21.6m	**Noa LANG**	*(PSV, Ned to Napoli, Ita)*
£21.5m	**Samuele RICCI**	*(Torino, Ita to Milan, Ita)*
£21.3m	**Theo HERNANDEZ**	*(Milan, Ita to Al Hilal, KSA)*
£21m	**Simon ADINGRA**	*(Brighton & Hove Albion, Eng to Sunderland, Eng)*
£20m	**DANILO**	*(Nottingham Forest, Eng to Botafogo, Bra)*
£19.6m	**Ange-Yoan BONNY**	*(Parma, Ita to Internazionale, Ita)*
£19.1m	**Johan BAKAYOKO**	*(PSV, Ned to RB Leipzig, Ger)*
£19m	**Fer LOPEZ**	*(Celta Vigo, Spa to Wolves, Eng)*
£18.7m	**Jesus RODRIGUEZ**	*(Real Betis, Spa to Como, Ita)*
£18.2m	**Thiago ALMADA**	*(Botafogo, Bra to Atletico Madrid, Spa)*
£18m	**Kamaldeen SULEMANA**	*(Southampton, Eng to Atalanta, Ita)*
£18m	**Chemsdine TALBI**	*(Club Brugge, Bel to Sunderland, Eng)*
£17.5m	**Maxime DE CUYPER**	*(Club Brugge, Bel to Brighton & Hove Albion, Eng)*
£17m	**Jonathan BURKARDT**	*(Mainz, Ger to Eintracht Frankfurt, Ger)*
£17m	**Antoni MILAMBO**	*(Feyenoord, Ned to Brentford, Eng)*
£16.5m	**Nicolas KUHN**	*(Celtic, Sco to Como, Ita)*
£15m	**Jaka BIJOL**	*(Udinese, Ita to Leeds United, Eng)*
£15m	**Noah SADIKI**	*(Union Saint-Gilloise, Bel to Sunderland, Eng)*
£14.6m	**Matteo RUGGERI**	*(Atalanta, Ita to Atletico Madrid, Spa)*
£14.4m	**Martin BATURINA**	*(Dinamo Zagreb, Cro to Como, Ita)*
£14.4m	**Adrien TRUFFERT**	*(Rennes, Fra to Bournemouth, Eng)*
£14.25m	**Borja SAINZ**	*(Norwich City, Eng to Porto, Por)*
£13.7m	**Alberto MOLEIRO**	*(Las Palmas, Spa to Villarreal, Spa)*
£13m	**Loum TCHAOUNA**	*(Lazio, Ita to Burnley, Eng)*
£12.9m	**VINI SOUZA**	*(Sheffield United, Eng to Wolfsburg, Ger)*
£12m	**Sean LONGSTAFF**	*(Newcastle United, Eng to Leeds United, Eng)*
£11.1m	**Albert GUDMUNDSSON**	*(Genoa, Ita to Fiorentina, Ita)*
£10.2m	**Jair CUNHA**	*(Botafogo, Bra to Nottingham Forest, Eng)*
£10m	**Kyogo FURUHASHI**	*(Rennes, Fra to Birmingham City, Eng)*
£10m	**IGOR JESUS**	*(Botafogo, Bra to Nottingham Forest, Eng)*
£10m	**Christian NORGAARD**	*(Brentford, Eng to Arsenal, Eng)*
£7.7m	**Quilindschy HARTMAN**	*(Feyenoord, Ned to Burnley, Eng)*
£5m	**KEPA Arrizabalaga**	*(Bournemouth, Eng to Arsenal, Eng)*
£5m	**Kota TAKAI**	*(Kawasaki Frontale, Jpn to Tottenham Hotspur, Eng)*
£5m	**Kyle WALKER**	*(Manchester City, Eng to Burnley, Eng)*

*Loan deal turned permanent

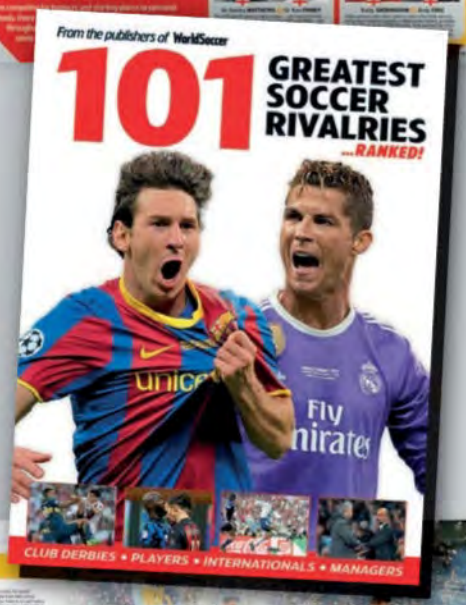
Marquee signing... England defender Kyle Walker joins newly promoted Burnley
Credit: Burnley FC

Magpies new boy...Newcastle's £55 million man Anthony Elanga

New recruit... Chelsea's Joao Pedro impressed at the Club World Cup

From the publishers of **WorldSoccer**

101 GREATEST SOCCER RIVALRIES ...RANKED!



100-PAGE BOOKAZINE

Our ranked countdown of football's greatest-ever rivalries – including feisty club derbies, deep-rooted international contests, antagonistic player showdowns and fractious managerial meetings – is your ultimate guide to the game's most significant and enduring animosities

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Price: £9.99 Visit: shop.kelsey.co.uk/product/101-greatest-soccer-rivalries

"You win a cup, actually win something for the first time in your history. Somebody said to me it's like winning the lottery, going to the counter and you don't get the prize"

Crystal Palace chairman Steve Parish speaking to *Sky Sports News* after UEFA's ruling to demote the Premier League club from the Europa League to the Conference League

The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

8
Clubs set to appear in a one-month long competition being organised in war-torn Sudan after a pause in football for over two years.

1
Penarol won the Uruguayan Intermedio for the first time, defeating Nacional in a penalty shootout following a goalless draw after 120 minutes of football.

100
Goals forward Vivianne Miedema has scored for the Netherlands after netting against Wales at Euro 2025. She became the 19th woman to score 100 international goals.

The 100 club...Dutch ace Vivianne Miedema

28
Age of ex-Chelsea youth player Charly Musonda as he announced his retirement. He represented Belgium from U15 to U21 level and most recently played for Cypriot club Anorthosis.

3
Goals Palestine forward Wessam Abou Ali scored for Al Ahly v Porto, becoming the first Asian player in history to score a hat-trick in a FIFA club competition.

£1m
Transfer fee Arsenal Women paid Liverpool to sign forward Olivia Smith. The Canada international becomes the first £1 million-player in the women's game.

Forever 20...Diogo Jota's Liverpool shirt number is retired

20
Liverpool shirt number retired in honour of Diogo Jota, including the women's team and throughout the academy, "making it eternal – and therefore never to be forgotten."

1
FIFA recognised Chelsea as the first-ever Club World Cup champions, with the winners of the previous format being renamed to Intercontinental champions.

€322m
Financing La Liga club Valencia successfully secured to build their new stadium – Nou Mestalla – scheduled to open in 2027.

3
Tier of the United Soccer League in which the Cosmos will play in 2026. The iconic New York soccer club have been relaunched and will be based in Paterson, New Jersey.

41
Age that Spanish midfielder Santi Cazorla will turn next season. He signed a new one-year contract with boyhood club Real Oviedo as they prepare themselves for Spanish top-flight football for the first time since 2000-01.

2035
Year Manchester United want to host the Women's World Cup final in their proposed new 100,000-seater stadium.

29%
Stake of Scottish club Hearts now owned by Brighton & Hove Albion chairman Tony Bloom after he completed a £9.86m deal.

4
Tier that Italian club Brescia may have to start next season in as a new entity after they had their licence revoked for bankruptcy.

5
Number of consecutive Major League Soccer games in which Lionel Messi scored a brace, extending his own record after becoming the first player to score four consecutive doubles in MLS history.

Double trouble... Messi hit five back-to-back MLS braces

597
Games Luka Modric played for Real Madrid ahead of his free transfer to Milan – the club he supported as a child due to his idol Zvonimir Boban starring for them in the 1990s.

£1bn
Reported value of Manchester City's new ten-year kit deal with Puma – the largest in the Premier League.

£20m
Investment Scottish Premiership side Rangers received from their new American owners, brought in by new chairman Andrew Cavenagh.

16
Age of Gilberto Mora when he overtook Lamine Yamal and Pele to become the youngest-ever player to lift an international trophy after Mexico's CONCACAF Gold Cup win.

Mexico starlet ...teen sensation Gilberto Mora

2035
Year to which Spain winger Nico Williams' new contract will run with his boyhood side Athletic Club.

6
Months Jhon Duran spent at Al Nassr before moving to Fenerbahce on loan. The Colombian left Aston Villa for Saudi Arabia in January.

10
Years Montenegrin club FK Arsenal Tivat have been banned from UEFA competitions after an investigation into allegations of match-fixing.

DIOGO JOTA

1996-2025

LIVERPOOL FC
L.F.C.

THE ADOPTED SCOUSER

Diogo Jota will be sorely missed on Merseyside, writes **Paul Hassall**

Liverpool Football Club's trophy-laden history has so often been intertwined with moments of heartbreaking tragedy. The 1980s comprised part of a golden era of success but was also cast into shadow by the dark spectre of both Heysel and Hillsborough. Now, a new chapter of glory following the Reds' Premier League title triumph has once again been obfuscated by grief.

The news of the devastating death of forward Diogo Jota alongside his brother Andre Silva in a car crash in Spain left the city's community rocked and heartbroken. The feeling around Anfield in the immediate aftermath was one of numbness and sorrow. Not just for the loss of a great footballer, but for a humble, family man with working-class roots, who embodied the sort of down-to-earth principles and "Scouse" characteristics that epitomise Liverpudlian life.

The "Liverpool family" came together as it always does, with supporters, former players and neighbours Everton among those to pay their respects and sign the books of condolence.

Hundreds of flowers, scarves and shirts with Jota's number 20 jersey emblazoned on the back were fittingly laid opposite the stadium's Hillsborough Memorial, eventually stretching beyond the full length of the Main Stand.

Team-mates past and present began to post stories of his down-to-earth nature, love for life and his three young children – all brought up on Merseyside – which made his loss just 11 days after his wedding to his childhood sweetheart, Rute Cardoso, all the more difficult to accept.

As the Liverpool squad gathered in Portugal for his funeral in his hometown of Gondomar, fans continued to come from near and far to pay their respects at Anfield. Local families with split footballing loyalties turned up in red and blue, echoing the united front of the past.

It is the Liverpool way that heroes and icons are often seen as family, and the overriding feeling among the majority at the ground was that it felt like they had lost someone close and dear; Jota was very much an adopted Scouser.

Liverpool star ...Diogo Jota

The city's newspaper, *The Liverpool Echo*, ran the headline: "Forever our number 20" with the picture of a beaming Diogo holding aloft the Premier League trophy.

The former Wolverhampton Wanderers star signed for The Reds in 2020, wore the number 20 and helped deliver the club's record-equalling 20th top-flight title. The poignancy is clear and Liverpool have since announced that his number will be retired in his honour.

As the club begins to try to heal in the weeks and months ahead, further tributes will be planned while memories of Jota the footballer will shine bright.

The forward proved to be a regular thorn in Arsenal's side, notched a Champions League hat-trick against Atalanta and scored the first Premier League goal of the Arne Slot era. And who can forget his video-game controller celebration in front of the Kop after scoring a stoppage-time winner to beat Tottenham 4-3?

Jota also helped lift the FA Cup and League Cup during his time with the club, but his final season did involve some personal frustration as he fought for full fitness after sustaining a lung injury against Chelsea in October.

Still, that didn't stop Diogo from providing key contributions to Liverpool's success. The winner at Crystal Palace, the equaliser against Fulham and his header within seconds of coming off the bench at Nottingham Forest were important, but it is perhaps the last-ever goal of his life that will be most fondly remembered.

The solo strike at the Kop end to secure a 1-0 victory over a defensively obdurate Everton was trademark Jota: the sudden surge from being seemingly peripheral to a blur of direct brilliance as a quick slalom was followed by a delicious wrong-footing finish.

It was quintessential Jota, now a Liverpool player for eternity. The 28-year-old never retired or moved clubs; he passed away as a Liverpool star in his prime and his song will be sung on matchdays for generations to come: "*Oh, his name is Diogo!*"

Jota himself cut a joyous figure the last time he heard it at Anfield as he sang along during his solo dance with the Premier League trophy. His grin as the conclusion of his anthem reverberated around one of the world's most iconic stadiums said it all. This was a place he felt firmly at home – both on and off the pitch.

As he put it himself: "To arrive at this particular season with the title that I've been chasing for a lot of years and in the best league in the world – for me where I dreamed to play as a kid – it's a moment I will cherish forever."

Sadly, he did not have long to bask in the glory of the achievement, but he will be cherished forever.

JOTA IN NUMBERS

182 *Liverpool appearances*

65 *Liverpool goals*

5 *Trophies in England*

190 *Premier League appearances*

63 *Premier League goals*

ABOVE: Hat-trick hero...Jota with the match ball after his Champions League treble versus Atalanta

LEFT: Anfield debut...Jota's first game at Anfield was actually in May 2019 for Wolves, who have since inducted him into their club's Hall of Fame

Trademark celebration...Jota after netting his dramatic late winner v Tottenham

ABOVE: Last-ever goal...Jota scores against Everton in the Merseyside derby

RIGHT: Title winner...Jota holds aloft the Premier League trophy

THE ANTI-STAR

Diogo Jota was the humble hero of Portuguese football, writes **Tom Kundert**

It's customary when public figures die to hear tributes eulogising their best character traits, but in Diogo Jota's case the avalanche of testaments regarding his personality leave no doubt that this was a universally loved human being.

News of the tragic death in a car accident of Jota and his brother Andre Silva shocked Portugal. Within hours, tributes had been made by the prime minister and president of the country as a profound sadness underpinned the blanket coverage on all media. But it was the words of former team-mates and those who knew him best that hit hardest.

Simplicity, humility and joy are among the most common adjectives used to describe Jota, which perfectly reflect the humble but happy upbringing that moulded him.

The son of factory employees – his father worked in a crane-making factory, his mother for a manufacturer of electronic car parts – in the small northern town of Gondomar, 20km east of Porto, his uncommon talent made him stand out as a kid playing for the local football team.

In addition to his ability with the ball at his feet, it was evident from the start that Diogo was a boy with a big heart. "He never asked us to buy him branded football boots," his father explained in a feature on Jota published on the Portuguese website *Maisfutebol* in 2020 shortly after his transfer to Liverpool. "He never even talked about it. He knew we couldn't afford them.

"When he was at Pacos de Ferreira the coaches told us they thought he had a chance of making a name for himself in the game. They also said he was a pleasure to be around given his sense of responsibility, the way he conducted himself and how he related to his team-mates and everyone at the club. That's what really made us proud as parents. We felt we had done a good job."

That simplicity and humility would never change. In the days following his death, multiple Portuguese journalists referred to him as the "anti-star" and questioned why he had not been given more recognition during his lifetime.

Portugal hero... Jota scored 14 goals for Portugal

"Jota was a very simple person. He had no filters. It was even funny at times when he got annoyed, because he was a very direct person," said Bernardo Silva on the day of the funeral. "The memories I have of him are fantastic. These happy memories will always stay with me."

Jota took an unusual route to the top of the game in Portugal. Virtually all *Selecao* players come through one of the country's three main academies, Benfica, Sporting or Porto, with a few recent examples having made the grade via Braga. Jota battled his way to the full national team having learned his trade at Gondomar and Pacos de Ferreira, two tiny clubs by comparison.

"His career, although it's not the most important thing right now, speaks for itself," said Bernardo. "He didn't come through any of the *tres grandes* and he had a more difficult path. His passion, drive and determination allowed him to triumph in life and have a brilliant career."

Ruben Neves played alongside Jota in 162 matches for Porto, Wolves and Portugal, and the two were particularly close. In Neves' heart-wrenching tribute to his friend, the incredulity at his passing and the insistence that he would never be forgotten were repeated themes in all the tributes.

"More than a friendship, we're family, and we won't stop being so just because now you decided to sign a contract a little further away from us! When I go to the *Selecao*, you'll be next to me at the dinner table, on the bus, on the plane... You'll always be with me as usual. Let's keep laughing, making plans, sharing our life with each other. I'm going to make sure that your loved ones never lack anything...Life brought us together. Nothing will tear us apart. We've already achieved so much side by side, and we've still got more to do. From now on, you'll step onto the pitch with me, and we'll continue walking this path."

Neves was in the United States at the Club World Cup when the fatal accident occurred. Immediately after playing in the quarter-final for Al Hilal against Fluminense, he and Joao Cancelo flew to Portugal to attend the funeral, which took place just a few hours after the game had finished. Neves helped carry the coffin from the church to the cemetery and spent much of the time embracing and consoling Diogo's widow, Rute Cardoso.

As well as famous faces from the world of football, hundreds of locals were there. Diogo had made a point of keeping strong ties to the local community throughout his career. Dozens of children wore or brought shirts that had been personally signed by the Liverpool forward at the Academia Diogo Jota he had set up in the town, which transformed into an impromptu shrine to the player.

The entrance of the academy bears a giant mural depicting Jota as a child playing for Gondomar and Jota as an adult playing for Portugal with a quote from the player: "It doesn't matter where we come from, but rather where we are going."

JOTA IN NUMBERS

68 *Primeira Liga appearances*

22 *Primeira Liga goals*

2 *UEFA Nations League titles*

49 *Portugal caps*

14 *Portugal goals*

Key goal...Jota celebrates scoring against Turkey in the 2022 World Cup qualifying play-offs

ABOVE: Champions League scorer... Jota's first-ever European goal was against Leicester in 2016

LEFT: Euro 2020... Jota's first major tournament

RIGHT: Nations League winner... Jota poses with the trophy

BELOW: Portuguese contingent... Jota was part of the team that fired Wolves to Premier League promotion in 2018

Football Remembers DIOGO JOTA

ABOVE: Portugal...a memorial with scarves, shirts and flowers outside the Diogo Jota Academy in his hometown of Gondomar

Switzerland...a fan holds a picture of Jota ahead of Portugal's clash with Spain at the Women's Euros

United States...Mexico's Raul Jimenez imitates his former Wolves team-mate's goal celebration after scoring in the CONCACAF Gold Cup final

England...an aerial view of the tributes made to Jota outside Anfield

United States...Al Hilal's Kalidou Koulibaly comforts Jota's Portuguese team-mates Ruben Neves and Joao Cancelo during the Club World Cup

Switzerland...a tribute to Jota ahead of the 2025 Women's European Championship group-stage match between France and England

ABOVE: England...a floral tribute is left on the gates outside Anfield

RIGHT: England...more tributes are laid outside Anfield

eyewitness

Samindra Kunti reports

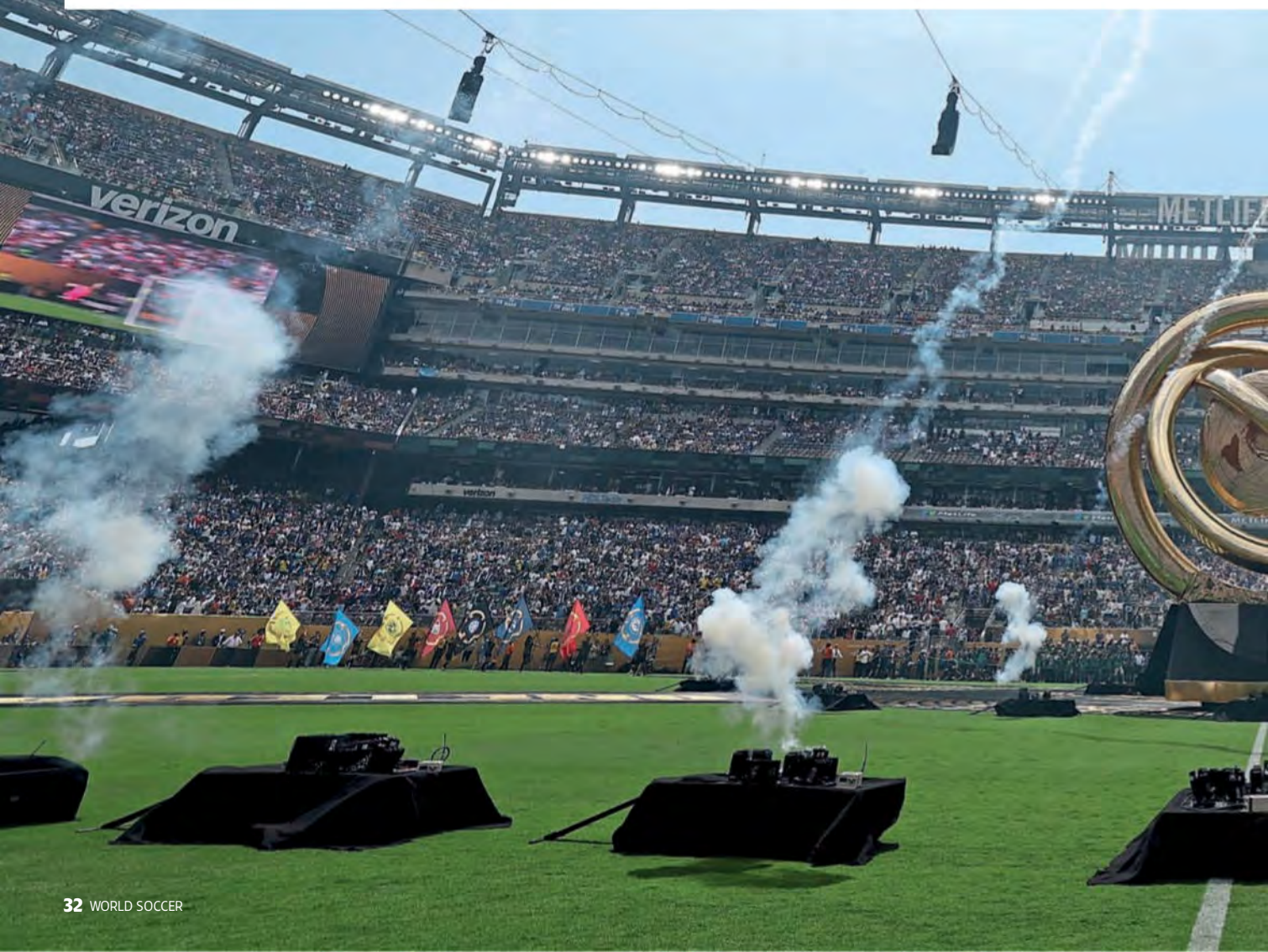
UNITED STATES

A year from now

The Club World Cup in the USA painted a picture of what next year's jointly-hosted FIFA World Cup could look like

Is the United States ready to host the 2026 World Cup? Every host nation – or co-host – is the subject of scrutiny when staging football's ultimate extravaganza. The Club World Cup showcased America's hosting credentials, but concerns remain, not least in times of shifting geopolitics and the US administration's policies towards immigration.

In 1994, the US hosted the World Cup for the first time. Bill Clinton had just swept to power on a ticket to restore the economy. For the first time in 12 years, the same party held Congress and the White House. At 46, Clinton, the youngest American president ever, promised to preserve America's ideals: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. Part of that happiness was on display at the 1994 tournament. Never shy of a big event, Americans flocked to the



stadiums making it the biggest World Cup yet. Diana Ross famously opened the tournament and, after a 24-year hiatus, Brazil triumphed once again on the biggest stage.

Everything about the 2026 World Cup will be super-sized as well: the 48 finalists, the 104 matches, the NFL venues, the 16 host cities, the three co-hosts, the accumulated air miles and the projected revenue. It's a consequence of FIFA's insatiable expansionism, a politically expedient strategy for the organisation's president Gianni Infantino.

This summer the 2025 Club World Cup, in a 32-team format for the first time, provided a snapshot of next summer's tournament. FIFA "Americanised" the Club World Cup with individual player walk-on introductions, the roll-out of the referee body cameras and live footage (that seemed more to serve purposes of entertainment than decision-making), and a half-time show at the final.

At some venues, the Star-Spangled Banner, the American national anthem, was played well before kick-off, sometimes an obligation under local legislation. American sports events can often have patriotic and military undertones.

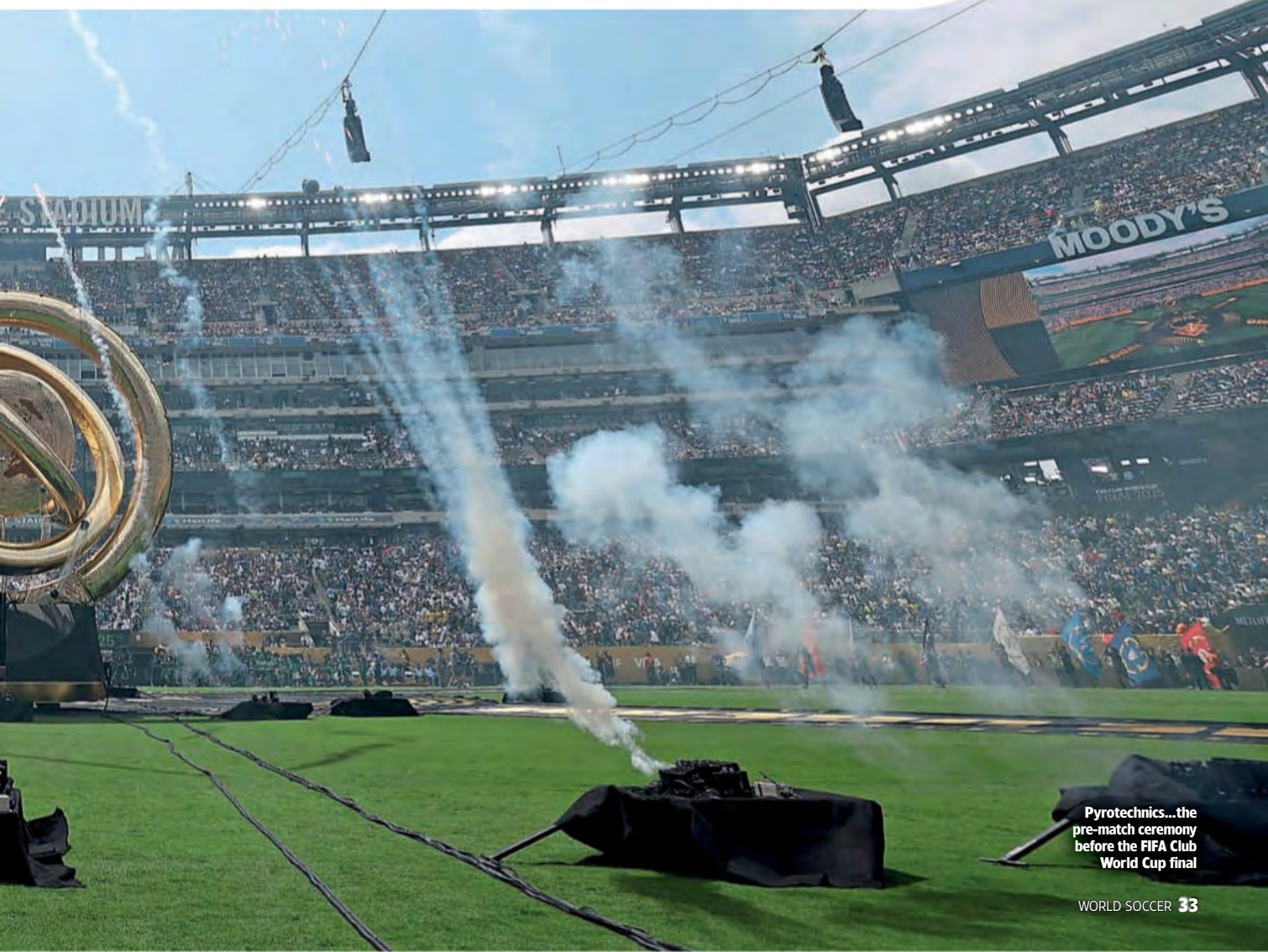
Both FIFA and the hosts were left red-faced by the hundreds of thousands of empty seats. The strategy of dynamic ticket pricing, common practice in the US, backfired. Drawing an attendance of just 3,412, Mamelodi Sundowns versus Ulsan HD in Orlando, Florida was symbolic of a tournament played at a pre-season pace in sweltering heat in front of disparate crowds.

With low interest, the world governing body scrambled to fill stadiums – vast NFL venues that often lacked charm and authenticity – and was forced to repeatedly slash prices for the first round, the quarter-finals and the semi-finals. Some tickets prices for the last eight were as low as $11.15. It was a comedown from the eye-watering pre-tournament ticket prices, including $2,230 for the final.

Next year, FIFA expects more than six million fans and projects $1.8 billion in ticketing revenue. Zurich is determined to maintain dynamic ticket pricing for the 2026 World Cup. Hospitality packages have already gone on sale with prices ranging from $3,500 to $73,000. In the US, supporters repeatedly expressed fears that they will be priced out.

The world governing body is yet to release ticket prices as well as the final match schedule to box in 100+ matches in the space of 39 days. The timings of the matches will reveal how seriously FIFA has taken the complaints over the heat. In the group stages, a heat wave gripped large swathes of the US.

"It's impossible, a terrible heat," said Atletico Madrid's Marcos Llorente after a lunchtime match against Paris Saint-Germain in Pasadena, California. "I felt it in my toes so much that my toenails were hurting, I couldn't slow down quickly or accelerate."



Pyrotechnics...the pre-match ceremony before the FIFA Club World Cup final

Mr Presidents...FIFA president Gianni Infantino and US president Donald Trump inspect the Golden Glove

Water break...FIFA rules mandate cooling breaks in hot conditions

"I don't think I have ever played in such heat, I don't think it's healthy, to be honest, but I managed to get through it, and the team did too," assessed Benfica's Andreas Schjelderup following his club's 1-0 victory against Bayern Munich in Charlotte, North Carolina. The estimated Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) was 29.2°C.

During Juventus' clash with Real Madrid in Miami, Juve head coach Igor Tudor said ten of his players asked to be substituted with temperatures reaching 30°C and humidity 70 per cent, while Borussia Dortmund boss Niko Kovac said he was "sweating like I've just come out of a sauna" during the victory over Mamelodi Sundowns. "Our subs watched the first half from inside the locker room to avoid the blazing sun at TQL Stadium," added Dortmund on X.

Enzo Maresca joined the chorus of complaints. Ahead of Chelsea's Group D match against Esperance in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Blues boss said: "It is almost impossible to train or to make a session because of the weather. Now, we are trying just to save energy for the game. This morning's session has been very, very, very short."

"I had to lie down on the ground because I was really dizzy," added Enzo Fernandez after Chelsea's semi-final at the MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. "Playing in this temperature is very dangerous."

FIFA rules mandated cooling breaks at the 30th and 75th minute of play when the WBGT exceeded 32°C or 89.6° Fahrenheit.

The pitches themselves also proved problematic. "The ball bounces almost like if it were jumping around like a rabbit," observed PSG boss Luis Enrique, while Jude Bellingham also expressed concern. "The pitches aren't great," said the Real Madrid star. "It holds up the ball, the ball barely bounces and it's tough on the knees. Hopefully someone will look at that going into the World Cup next year. It's important that we protect the players as well as giving the fans a spectacle."

Extreme weather also played its part. Chelsea's knockout-round tie with Benfica was suspended for over two hours and was the sixth game to be halted due to seasonal thunderstorms. "It's not football," said Maresca. "I can understand if it's security reasons, but if you suspend seven or eight games then it's probably not the right place to do the competition."

During the Club World Cup, Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium was the only covered stadium. In 2026, the World Cup venues in Vancouver, Dallas, Houston and Los Angeles are roofed. Based on data by the American College of Sports Medicine, FIFPro listed Vancouver and the San Francisco Bay Area as the only two

Empty seats...Ulsan HD's clash against Mamelodi Sundowns was particularly poorly attended

host cities that carry a low risk of heat stress. The world players' union, which launched a legal complaint against FIFA over calendar congestion, proposed a 20-minute half-time break and more cooling breaks as mitigating measures.

Even Arsene Wenger, FIFA's chief of global soccer development, admitted that the heat was something of a problem. "It was, in some games, a problem," said Wenger. "But we tried to combat it with water breaks and as well by watering the pitches during breaks. I feel that we learned a lot during this time in the tournament because, certainly, we'll be moving to stadiums next year where we will play with roofs, with timing that is a little more sensitive to the heat."

Was this a message from Wenger to his superiors? FIFA is yet to finalise the details of next year's match schedule, but the group stages will culminate with six matches a day. "But it looks as well, at the same time, in Europe they have the same weather conditions and a future problem for everybody," said Wenger, acknowledging that climate change affects football globally.

In order to accommodate European TV audiences, just 15 out of 63 Club World Cup matches got underway after 6pm. In 1994, lunchtime kick-offs were the norm for the same reason. The tournament is not remembered for its quality. Rather, Romario and captain Dunga dragged Brazil through the gruelling Pasadena heat and a nerve-racking final penalty-shootout victory against Italy to a fourth global crown. Drenched in sweat, Dunga, vindicated, lifted the World Cup.

> "The pitches aren't great. It holds up the ball, the ball barely bounces and it's tough on the knees. Hopefully someone will look at that going into the World Cup next year"
>
> **Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham**

FIFA will be hoping for a more memorable edition this time. The US have a history of staging successful, major sporting events. They staged the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and hosted the 1999 Women's World Cup, which catapulted the US women's national team to the top of the game. The current decade represents another golden age in major sports events: the US will organise the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games. That will be followed by the 2031 Rugby World Cup and the 2031 Women's World Cup.

But the Trump administration is causing deep divides around the world, and its immigration policies are not reassuring for visiting fans, stakeholders and media. Vice-President JD Vance warned fans about overstaying their visa. "Of course everyone is welcome to come and see this wonderful event. We want them to come...but when the time is up we want them to go home, otherwise they will have to talk to Secretary Noem," said Vance, referring to Kristi Noem, the Secretary of Homeland Security.

Infantino stated that: "America welcomes the world. That's how it has been, is and will be." But his comment doesn't reflect the administration's approach. Trump signed a travel ban for a dozen countries. Members of Senegal's women's basketball team were denied visas for a training camp. Brazilian table tennis player Hugo Calderano, one of the best in the world, was rejected a visa for an elite tournament because he had played at the Pan American Games in Cuba.

However, the Trump administration has thrown its weight behind the tournament in other ways. A White House Task Force, led by Andrew Giuliani, son of former New York City mayor and Trump ally Rudy Giuliani, was established to organise the World Cup. Congress has passed a policy bill with $625 million in security funding for the 11 American host cities, which are beholden to FIFA's stringent contractual obligations in terms of safety, security and protection.

With Infantino firmly in the orbit of the US president, the World Cup won't escape Trump's influence. His footprint was all over the Club World Cup. FIFA opened an office at Trump Tower and the US president, booed at the final, was front and centre at the medal ceremony and trophy presentation. Next year, some European supporters might just prefer to give it all a pass.

"Americanised" ...individual player walk-ons were used at the Club World Cup

Concerns...Jude Bellingham was critical of the pitch conditions

eye witness

Joe Phelan reports

FAROE ISLANDS

The beautiful game on the edge of the world

Despite its tiny population, the Faroe Islands has cultivated a football culture all of its own, rooted in rugged landscapes, local rivalries and community spirit

Since 1580, the stone fortress of Skansin has stood watch over Torshavn, the capital of the Faroe Islands, a remote North Atlantic archipelago halfway between Iceland and Scotland. Initially built to defend against pirates, the fort remains an enduring symbol of protection and pride in Faroese life.

In recent years, "Skansin" has taken on a new meaning. A short walk from the old fort, at the national stadium Torsvollur, a passionate group of Faroese football fans have adopted the name for their supporters' stand – a modern-day stronghold of drums, flags and folk songs.

It's a passion that's far from confined to the terraces. Across these wind-swept islands, football runs deep.

In a nation of just over 50,000 people, more than 8,000 play football regularly – roughly one in six. Of those, around 5,700 are officially registered players, meaning one in every ten Faroese is part of the formal footballing system. These numbers are extraordinary considering that football isn't even the official national sport (that honour belongs to rowing).

Clubs here are more than just teams; they are the social heart of their communities. Many of them support multiple age groups, with boys and girls often training together under the same roof. In smaller towns and villages, local football clubs serve as communal hubs, where parents coach, siblings referee, and grandparents cheer from the sidelines.

Torsvollur...fans inside the national stadium

Standing watch... the stone fortress of Skansin

Passionate support... a fan leads the songs during a Faroe Islands international match

The structure of Faroese football is closely tied to local governance, with all stadiums owned and maintained by the islands' various municipal councils. This ensures that facilities meet community needs while giving clubs an active role in shaping and developing their grounds.

This strong grassroots foundation directly fuels the Faroe Islands Premier League, a competition that ranks ahead of leagues in countries with far larger populations, including Northern Ireland, Estonia, Albania, Wales, Belarus and North Macedonia. The league is both competitive and ambitious, reflecting the community spirit and passion that drives football across the islands.

Nothing captures the passion of Faroese football like the rivalry between HB and B36. For nearly a century, these two clubs have gone head-to-head, competing for the pride of the capital. And, given they share the Gundadalur Stadium in Torshavn – each club has their own separate stand within the ground – every contest between the pair is charged with an added dose of intensity.

HB are the most decorated and arguably best-known club in the nation's history, boasting 24 league titles and 30 cup victories, and have even won nine games in European competition.

But, as Hogni Berg, HB's head of media and communications, explains, the club isn't content to rest on its past or to live solely for the B36 derby days – it is determined to play a defining role in shaping the future of Faroese football.

"The biggest opportunity for future growth is in talent development," Berg

"Skansin"...the Faroe Islands' supporters group

Gundadalur...HB and B36 have their own individual stands

says. "In that regard, we are leading the way. We are the only club actively selling players to bigger leagues. The transfer fees aren't huge, but some of the clauses in those contracts can give us a financial windfall.

"In the last year we've sold players to Italy, Slovenia, Finland and Norway. Clubs in Europe are looking for talented players everywhere, and if one or two of our players can go and make a name for themselves in Europe, more clubs will turn their attention to the Faroe Islands."

Despite strong club loyalties and fiery rivalries, Berg is keen to emphasise that all teams across the Faroes' 18 islands share a common ambition: to elevate the league, expand the game's reach, nurture homegrown talent, and play a role in bolstering community ties.

> **"Most of the players here have full-time jobs. They work eight hours a day before coming into training"**
> HB head of media and communications Hogni Berg

"I hope we will soon see more Faroese players playing abroad, and that clubs will continue to invest both on and off the pitch," adds Berg. "Most of the players here have full-time jobs. They work eight hours a day before coming into training. For some, that can be too much. That's why we see some players retiring at a young age.

"When they want to start a family, it simply becomes too much. If clubs could improve their finances and pay higher wages, they could maybe have the players work less and train earlier in the day. Then they would have a "normal" workday, which would improve Faroese football a lot."

One area where Faroese football has made huge strides in recent years is in the women's game. Far from being a niche pursuit, women now make up around 30 per cent of all registered players – more than double the global average, and nearly triple the European figure.

Several clubs have made concerted efforts to elevate their women's teams, focusing on developing homegrown talent and raising professional standards, aiming to develop talent systematically and sustainably.

Lukasz Cieslewicz, the current head coach of HB Torshavn women's team,

Great strides...the Faroe Islands' women's team narrowly missed out on the play-offs in Euro 2025 qualifying

believes that, as with the men's side, success is all about having the right structures in place.

"We are a club that wants to use our own players, and that means we are aware that we need to have a good development offer," says Cieslewicz, who was born in Poland but moved to the Faroes at the age of 12 and later represented B36 Torshavn's men for eight years. "To strengthen that, we are adding quality coaches every year so we can improve the development of our young players. The last, and maybe the most important, thing is that we want to be professional. We want to raise the bar every year, both for coaches and the players."

Community clubs ...a pitch in the village of Nolsoy
Credit: Bodey Marcoccia

The Faroese football season runs from March to November, with the cup final marking the conclusion of the year's campaign. Despite this spring-autumn schedule, the weather often plays a significant role, particularly at the edges of the season. Early spring can still carry the chill of winter, while late autumn routinely brings biting winds, persistent rain, and snowfall.

The unique setting is impossible to ignore. Every pitch is surrounded by staggering natural beauty

Unpredictable conditions can make outdoor sessions challenging, especially during pre-season. But, with most clubs

Vid Margair...home ground of EB/Streymur

ABOVE and LEFT: Stunning landscapes...a pitch at Eidi, in the northwest of the islands

now having invested in well-equipped indoor gyms, players can train year-round. It's a small but telling sign of how the game is steadily becoming more professional across the islands.

The raw, physical landscape has forged a deep-rooted resilience and passion in both the players and the fans. That toughness, born from braving everything nature throws their way, is what has come to define the Faroese game: rugged, spirited and unmistakably local.

The national team perfectly reflects that. In the past year, the Faroe Islands have secured hard-fought draws with Latvia and North Macedonia, and recorded victories over Gibraltar and Armenia. For a country whose entire population could fit inside Wembley and still leave 40,000 seats empty, every point is significant, and every performance is steeped in pride.

In the Faroes, the unique setting is impossible to ignore. Every pitch is surrounded by staggering natural beauty – jagged cliffs, crashing seas and cloud-wrapped peaks. It grants games a sense of drama and scale that's hard to replicate.

It's a special footballing environment, one shaped as much by the terrain as by the determination and passion of the players and fans who love the sport.

eyewitness

Mike Plastow reports

JAPAN

The two Yokohamas

The rivalry between Yokohama's two biggest clubs, Yokohama F-Marinos and Yokohama FC, has livened up like never before in this year's J. League – but not quite in the way that either side would have wanted.

On the final weekend before the J. League broke off for its short summer break in July, Yokohama F-Marinos edged Yokohama FC 1-0 with a late penalty in the derby match. It was F-Marinos' first win in five league matches and Yokohama FC's fifth straight league defeat. The result left both clubs in the relegation zone, with F-Marinos bottom on 18 points from 23 games and Yokohama FC two places higher with just one point more.

Yokohama F-Marinos have had a nightmare start to the 2025 season. The five-time J. League champions – most recently under Kevin Muscat in 2022 – had to wait until their fifth match to record their first league win. With still only that single victory to show after 11 league games, new manager Steve Holland was dismissed in April. Patrick Kisnorbo, promoted from assistant to replace Holland, soon followed him out of the door in June with a record of eight defeats in ten games in all competitions. The two consecutive league losses at the time of Holland's removal had turned into seven, Marinos' worst-ever league run.

Kisnorbo's replacement, the former Yokohama Flugels and F-Marinos forward, Hideo Oshima, has fared little better. That one narrow victory against Yokohama FC followed a draw and two losses against teams battling with one eye on the relegation zone.

Oshima's sensible ploy was to return F-Marinos to how they were last season by restoring the all-Brazilian frontline of Elber, Anderson Lopes and Yan Matheus for the first time this year. Phrased differently, F-Marinos are simply out of ideas. Their opponents have also changed. From disbelief that F-Marinos could be where they are in the table, every other team now senses the points are there for the taking.

In contrast, Yokohama FC's struggles are very much business as usual. FC have always been the challengers and their recent yo-yoing between the two top divisions is in fact their best-ever period. Their coach, Shuhei Yomoda, has already led his team to top-flight promotion twice since taking over for the 2022 season. FC play a diligent game with quick pressing from the front, but, like F-Marinos, have scored too few goals to show for their effort. Though seldom overwhelmed, they suffer too many narrow defeats.

The recent derby was a case in point. FC played most of the first half in the F-Marinos half and gave as good as they got in the second period, too. If FC never quite looked like scoring, F-Marinos did not either. F-Marinos got the penalty at the end but were not going to find the net any other way.

The two big Yokohama clubs could hardly be more different. F-Marinos play at Nissan Stadium, the 72,000-capacity 2002 World Cup final venue; Yokohama FC at the 15,440-capacity Nippatsu Stadium nearby. F-Marinos have won the J. League five times (the first time as simply Yokohama Marinos) and enjoy global connection as a member of the City Football Group, a roughly 20 per cent shareholder in the club since 2014. FC have played only five seasons in total in the top flight, including this year. By business scale, F-Marinos' reported operating revenues of nearly £40 million in 2024 were more than double Yokohama FC's £17m. Together with ▸

Yokohama derby ...Thomas Deng of Yokohama F-Marinos holds off Yokohama FC's Keisuke Muroi

Kashima Antlers, F-Marinos are the only J. League team never to have been relegated from the top flight.

Even so, F-Marinos' fall from grace was not quite as sudden as it may look from abroad. While still performing well in the Asian Champions League into the start of this year, domestically F-Marinos were already looking ragged in the final months of 2023 under Kevin Muscat, the second in the line of Australian managers that started with Ange Postecoglou in 2018. Harry Kewell, Muscat's successor in 2024, lasted only seven months, and F-Marinos eventually wound up ninth under his replacement, John Hutchinson. Each successive manager stayed essentially faithful to the Postecoglou system but with rapidly diminishing returns.

At their best under Postecoglou and Muscat, F-Marinos combined tight defending with quick pressing and seamless switching, sweeping forward in numbers across the full width of the pitch. They were blessed with talent in every attacking position. In that latest championship year of 2022, F-Marinos' goals were evenly distributed with 11 each for Anderson Lopes and Leo Ceara, ten for Takuma Nishimura, eight for Elber, and so on down the list.

Former Yokohama F-Marinos managers ...Kevin Muscat and Steve Holland

By 2024, although much of the attacking momentum remained, the defensive stability was gone and so was the attacking versatility. F-Marinos still scored 61 times, the same tally as champions Vissel Kobe, but conceded 62. Instead of sharing the goals, the scoring was dominated by a single name, Anderson Lopes, whose tally of 24 won him the Golden Boot for a second year in a row.

After that long series of Australian

Departing hero...prolific striker Anderson Lopes left Yokohama F-Marinos for Singaporean champions Lion City Sailors in July

managers, this year's appointment of Steve Holland came as an interesting surprise. Holland's direct managerial experience was limited but there was no questioning his rich knowledge of the game as a former assistant to Gareth Southgate at England and Jose Mourinho, Guus Hiddink and Antonio Conte at Chelsea.

When Holland arrived, he was clear that rebuilding had to start from the back. This worked in a sense – F-Marinos only conceded four times in their first six league games – but the goals dried up as well. Holland was unlucky with injuries to key players, such as Colombian centre-back Jeison Quinones, not to mention a punishing schedule of 15 games and a lot of travel in just 63 days due to Champions League commitments. In the end, there was never enough time on the training ground and neither Holland nor his successor, Kisnorbo, could turn the team around in the time available. Even Anderson Lopes stopped scoring. His penalty against Yokohama FC in July was his first league goal since the opening day of the season.

The F-Marinos supporters have been fantastic throughout, increasingly teary-eyed but still cheering their team long after the final whistle. When it comes to fan support, however, Yokohama FC's explicitly anti-F-Marinos history also has a special place in Yokohama football lore and this, too, is a story that has to be told.

To understand the full background to the Yokohama derby, it is necessary to go back to 1993, when the J. League began and Yokohama was awarded two of the new league's ten founding clubs: Yokohama Marinos and Yokohama Flugels. Marinos grew out of the rising Nissan club, which had just won its first national titles in the Japan Soccer League in 1988-89 and 1989-90. Flugels were the former ANA (All Nippon Airways) club that had only reached the top flight in the 1988-89 campaign. But with the start of the J. League, Yokohama became Japan's foremost football city overnight.

The Flugels story then ended unhappily in 1998 when a major sponsor withdrew and the two Yokohama clubs were subjected to an unequal merger. With emotions running high, Flugels went out with a bang by winning the Emperor's Cup in their last-ever match on New Year's Day, 1999. A number of Flugels' players crossed over to Marinos together with the "F" of Flugels – hence the new name, Yokohama F-Marinos – but many Flugels fans were outraged. And so the story of Yokohama FC began.

The two big Yokohama clubs could hardly be more different

Yokohama FC had been founded a week before that cup final, on Christmas Day 1998, and joined the J. League in 2001. The club badge explains the rest: the blue ribbon at the top is the ribbon that the Flugels fans and players wore in silent protest during the club's final weeks. The phoenix, of course, then rose from the ashes.

The FC in the name also matters. Japanese football club names rarely include any equivalent to the term "Football Club". The FC is not a translation from Japanese. It hearkens back specifically to imagined values of the era when professional football began. This is football fundamentalism: a rejection of the flamboyant Marinos, Flugels and F-Marinos monikers. Tokyo's biggest club, FC Tokyo, also chose the same device in the same year, 1998, as a statement of football purity.

Yokohama FC got started by introducing Barcelona's *socio* model and first reached the top flight in 2007 after six seasons in the second-tier J. League 2. They ended bottom that year but scored a memorable first-ever home league derby victory, 1-0 against Yokohama F-Marinos.

Another 12 years in J2 passed before FC got their second bite at the J1 cherry in 2020. This time they stayed up, finishing 15th in the first year, but were bottom and relegated again in 2021. Second in J2 in 2022, they finished bottom of J1 in 2023, won promotion again in 2024, and are now battling once more to stay up – but this time with the added, incalculable incentive of direct rivalry with neighbours F-Marinos at the foot of the table.

The rivalry between the Yokohama clubs has been rather one-sided – the head-to-head record in all competitions now reads eight wins for F-Marinos, two draws and three wins for FC – with the F-Marinos supporters generally looking elsewhere for their high-stakes fixtures. Kawasaki Frontale's Todoroki Stadium is, after all, only six miles from their Nissan Stadium. But even F-Marinos fans may see things differently if FC now finish above them in the table or, heaven forbid, FC stay up while F-Marinos go down.

The 2025 season could yet be the year when FC emerge from F-Marinos' shadow. It will be a hard act to maintain given those differences of scale but the vengeful underdogs, Yokohama FC, have it all to play for now.

Phoenix from the flames... Yokohama FC's badge is a nod to their history

Bowing out...Yokohama Flugels lift the Emperor's Cup after their last-ever game in January 1999

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia's perennial champions

Very few clubs across Europe have a stranglehold on their domestic league like Slovan Bratislava.

Founded in 1919, Slovan won the old Czechoslovak First League eight times and beat Barcelona 3-2 to win the now defunct European Cup Winners' Cup in 1969. Seven years later, seven Slovan players were part of the Czechoslovakia team that won the 1976 UEFA European Championship – more than any other club.

Before Czechoslovakia split into two countries in 1993, Slovan had stiff competition from the likes of Sparta and Slavia Prague, but the club has since gone on to dominate the independent Slovak football scene; in May, they won their seventh Slovak First Football League title in a row.

Only two other clubs in Europe – Ludogorets of Bulgaria with 14 successive wins and Serbia's Red Star Belgrade with eight – are on longer title-winning streaks than Slovan, whose foray in last season's UEFA Champions League (UCL) looks set to cement that grip.

Last season, Slovan Bratislava took their place in Europe's new-look 36-team league stage after beating Struga from North Macedonia, Celje of Slovenia, Cypriot champions APOEL and Danish giants Midtjylland in the qualifying rounds.

The competition itself proved a painful experience. Slovan lost all eight games, scoring just seven goals and only avoiding bottom place on goal difference. Yet despite finishing 35th out of 36 teams, the club pocketed an estimated €23 million in prize money.

Regular European participation for Slovan had already brought significant UEFA largesse, but to put that €23m in context, the club's 2024 annual revenue was €40m.

Slovan Bratislava's 2024-25 UCL windfall is a huge fillip in a domestic league where total revenue across the 12-club league in 2023 was €75m according to UEFA's latest Financial Benchmarking Report. Of that total, €17m came from UEFA, €6.5m from gate receipts, and domestic TV rights providing €3.5m.

The league has grown commercially, with revenue rising from €800,000 to €10m in the six seasons to 2024 thanks in part to sponsorship and commercial deals, including granting naming rights to betting company Niké. TV rights income has tripled with all games streamed live by Voyo, the biggest local streaming platform, but all money is shared.

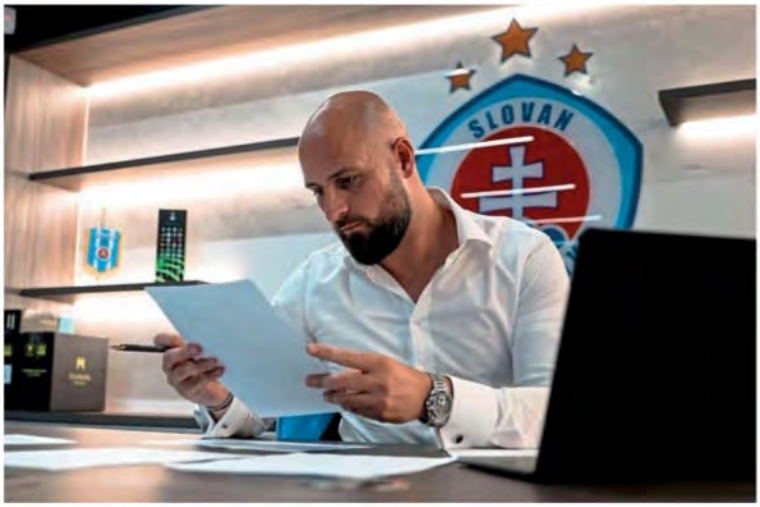
Michal Mertinyak, executive director of the Slovak League and member of European Leagues' board of directors, says: "It is a great achievement for the Slovak Niké Liga champion to be part of the UCL league phase and excellent publicity for the league. However, the prize money of €23m is having quite a distortive effect on the competitive balance.

"This prize money is actually 17.7 times more than the prize money for becoming a league champion. At the same time, the UEFA solidarity payment towards all other clubs is just 2.8 per cent per club payment from the amount received by Slovan. It is therefore very tough to keep the competitive balance in the league."

On virtually every measure, Slovan dominate their domestic rivals. In addition to being Slovakia's richest club, Slovan are also the best supported, with average

Slovakia's perennial champions... Slovan Bratislava

Experienced manager... Vladimir Weiss



Slovan Bratislava club president... Ivan Kmotrik

crowds of 5,800 at the NFS Tehelne Pole Stadium last season.

The 22,500-capacity arena was developed by the club's president Ivan Kmotrik in collaboration with the Slovak government as a replacement for the old Tehelne Pole Stadium, which was demolished in the summer of 2013. Kmotrik began work before the then-government of Robert Fico provided €45m to finish the stadium, which opened in 2019. With Fico back in power after a period in opposition, Slovan's reputation as the government's favourite team is stronger than ever.

In addition to being the best-supported and wealthiest club in Slovakia, Slovan Bratislava also have the league's most experienced coach. Vladimir Weiss has worked with Kmotrik before, taking the president's old club Artmedia Bratislava into the Champions League in 2005-06 before coaching the Slovakia and Georgia national teams then returning to team up for more success with Kmotrik again in 2021, replacing the Slovenian Darko Milanic.

Most of Slovakia's national team play abroad, such as goalkeeper Martin Dubravka at Newcastle United, midfielder Stanislav Lobotka in Serie A with Napoli, and captain Milan Skriniar, who spent the end of last season on loan at Fenerbahce from Paris Saint-Germain. But bolstered by regular UEFA prize money, Slovan Bratislava's budget eclipses their domestic rivals, allowing them to sign the best of the rest of the local talent and also shop abroad.

> On virtually every measure, Slovan Bratislava dominate their domestic rivals. In addition to being Slovakia's richest club, Slovan are also the best supported

In 2024, the club splashed out a record-equalling €1m to sign Croatian midfielder Marko Tolic from Dinamo Zagreb as well as paying €700,000 to make Slovakia international David Strelec's move from Spezia permanent. Tolic provided a rueful UCL highlight last season, getting sent off after back-to-back yellow cards against Milan, but Strelec was the joint top scorer domestically in 2024-25 with 20 goals.

Veteran midfielder Juraj Kucka, who spent many seasons in Serie A with Genoa, Milan and Parma, also returned home to finish his career, joining Slovan last summer before moving on to Banik Prievidza in July. Weiss' son, also Vladimir, joined the

The rise and fall of Artmedia Bratislava

Champions League ...Artmedia Bratislava pose for a team photo ahead of the Rangers tie at Ibrox in 2005

The man behind Slovan Bratislava's rise is club president Ivan Kmotrik, the multi-millionaire owner of Grafobal group and TV channel TA3, who has already enjoyed an earlier spell in the European limelight.

In 2003, Kmotrik invested in FC Petrzalka, a small, largely unheralded club in Bratislava, through another of his businesses, Euro RSCG Artmedia. Renamed Artmedia Bratislava, the club won the Slovak Cup a season later and the league title in 2004-05.

Entering the Champions League, Artmedia Bratislava became the first Slovakian club to make it all the way through to the group stage. Their remarkable journey started in the first qualifying round and included a 5-0 pasting of Celtic along the way. European champions just two years earlier, Porto were then beaten 3-2 away and held 0-0 at home and, in a group also including Italian giants Internazionale and then-Scottish champions Rangers, Artmedia finished third and only missed out on the knockout phase by a single point.

Two seasons later, the club won the Slovak double only for Kmotrik to leave. Subsequently renamed FC Petrzalka 1898, the club lost its ground and fell down the Slovak league pyramid. But Kmotrik has gone on to repeat that success on a more enduring basis at Slovan.

club the year before his father and captains a side featuring experienced internationals from Eastern Europe, such as defender Guram Kashia, captain of Georgia's national team, and Armenian winger Tigran Barseghyan, who equalled Strelec's 20 goals last season.

According to analytics website *Transfermarkt*, Slovan's 2024-25 squad was valued at €32.5m, compared with €12.9m for the runners-up MSK Zilina. Only one other club, DAC Dunajska Streda, had a squad valued in double figures and MFK Skalica, who narrowly avoided the relegation spots, was worth less than ten per cent of Slovan's total.

MSK Zilina and Spartak Trnava are Slovan's main domestic rivals. MSK Zilina have won seven titles and were runners up in 2024-25, but their last title success was in 2016-17. Spartak Trnava won the championship the following season before Slovan began their current reign of success.

Along with Inter Bratislava, who are now languishing in the third tier, and Slovan, Spartak Trnava are the only other Slovak side to have won the old Czechoslovak First League and their home game with Slovan in 2024-25 attracted the biggest domestic crowd for a league game of 12,528.

Regular competitors in Europe, Spartak won the 2025 Slovak Cup to secure a place in the Europa League qualifiers and general manager Martin Hudec is phlegmatic about the impact of Slovan's latest UEFA bonanza.

"We understand that it's not just about how much revenue a club earns from participating in European competitions – there are also significant costs involved," says Hudec. "That said, Slovan's economic strength, combined with its demographic advantages and the fact that it is based in the capital – the most economically developed region in the country – naturally gives them a head start over other clubs.

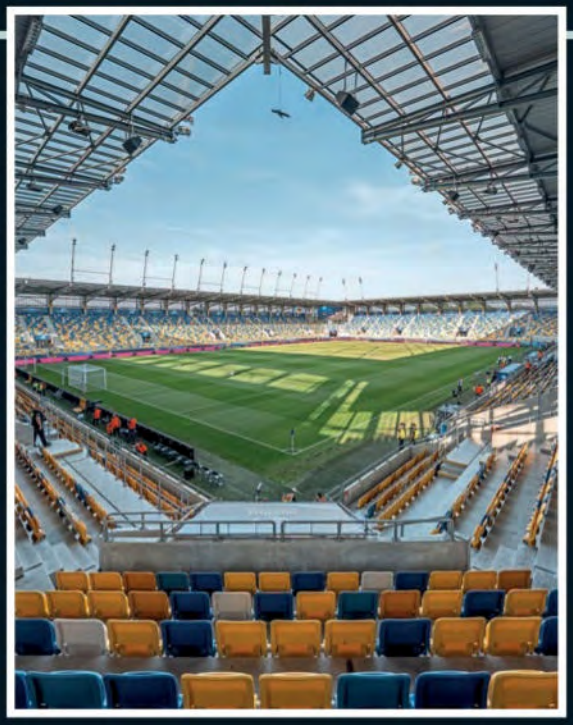
"As we saw this past season, despite their much larger budget, we were able to match them competitively in the Slovak Cup semi-final and even defeat them. What's crucial for Slovak football as a whole is that any club representing the country in European competitions progresses as far as possible. This increases the national coefficient, which ultimately benefits all clubs."

A serious challenger to Slovan Bratislava's league hegemony looked to be emerging in the shape of DAC Dunajska Streda from the Hungarian-speaking eastern region of Slovakia.

DAC was bought in 2014 by Slovak businessman Oszkar Vilagi, who also owns Hungarian club ETO FC Gyor. Like other clubs in Hungarian-speaking regions of bordering Hungary, DAC have benefitted from investment from Viktor Orban's government in Budapest. The second-best supported club after Slovan with average crowds of 5,700, DAC have finished as runners-up four times since 2018-19 but been unable to break through domestically or internationally.

The financial and cultural links with Hungary – Orban has attended games at the club's MOL Arena – does not always endear the club to the rest of Slovakia, and their 2024-25 European display was met with derision by some locals. While Slovan played with Europe's elite and MFK Ruzomberok and Spartak Trnava both got through rounds in Europe, DAC were drubbed 6-1 on aggregate by Zira of Azerbaijan in the Conference League.

To a degree, DAC contribute to Slovan's dominance as locals in a conservative country would rather a club seen as Slovakian dominate than a team that identifies more with a foreign country. With sizeable UEFA money to rely on, Slovan look likely to remain an impervious fixture at the top of the Slovak league.



Hungarian cultural links...the home of DAC Dunajska Streda

Slovan supporters... fans inside the NFS Tehelne Pole Stadium

SPECIAL REPORT

FRENCH FOOTBALL'S TRANSFER REVOLUTION

In the face of a TV rights crisis and a summer of financial uncertainty, Ligue 1 clubs are rethinking the transfer window

Words: Luke Entwistle

Time, it feels, is standing still in France. Inertia. One agent speaks of a "lifeless" window. Those claims are perhaps a little exaggerated – big names have come and big names have left – but in any ordinary year, Ligue 1 is pillaged. The yearly drain of the talent pool is facilitated by clubs' ability to replenish that pool and breach the gaping holes within their squad. It is a situation that breeds a frenzy, and we are certainly yet to see that this summer.

It is a perfect storm that creates the calm. DAZN, the Club World Cup, the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots – they all play a part.

DAZN acquired the TV rights for Ligue 1 last summer in a deal that was hastily agreed just before the start of the season, and one agreed on sub-optimal terms. The LFP, Ligue 1's governing body, had wanted a rather optimistic figure of €1 billion-per-season for the broadcasting rights. In the end, they didn't even get half that. DAZN secured the rights for a reduced price, with beIN Sports also picking up one match per gameweek. Combined, the deal was done for less than €500 million.

For DAZN, the deal included a get-out clause, one that was always likely to be triggered when it quickly became apparent that, at the rate they were charging customers, it would not be possible to meet the minimum threshold for subscribers in order to turn a profit. The broadcaster blamed the LFP and the clubs. In their eyes, the authorities did not do enough to curb piracy and illegal streaming, and the clubs were not providing sufficient behind-the-scenes access to allow the broadcaster to "add value" to the product. All parties have a share of blame for the mutually detrimental deal.

When the rupture between DAZN and the LFP was formalised towards the end of the season, no one was surprised. It was the agreement of the deal itself – not its premature conclusion after just one season – that was the moment of self-destruction. Clubs are now facing the consequences.

As clubs prepared to meet with French football's financial watchdog, the DNCG, they were informed that, for the coming season, they would have to budget without a single euro of TV rights money, such is the continued uncertainty. Transfer budgets and wage budgets have subsequently been revised downwards.

The LFP do, however, have a plan. An idea rejected 12 months ago, the body will create its own channel and then sell that product to providers. It could allow DAZN a route back into French football, while Amazon Prime Video are one of many other potential partners for the newly-created 100 per cent Ligue 1 channel. Canal+ however, an historic TV partner, has announced that they have "thrown in the towel". It is a blow.

LIGUE 1
DA
ZN

Regardless, the 2025-26 campaign will be a difficult one for French clubs, as announced by Nicolas de Tavernost, the CEO of LFP Media. "I won't hide it, the 2025-26 season will be difficult in terms of domestic TV rights. We know that," he said. Clubs know it too, and it showed in the opening weeks of the transfer window.

In the 2024-25 season, Ligue 1 clubs spent €994m on transfers. By early July, French clubs had spent just €106m. While the transfer window still has plenty of time remaining, it is hard to see that figure substantially increasing before the window slams shut at the end of August.

That is not to say that big transfers haven't happened. Paul Pogba joining Monaco is one of the most highly anticipated moves in world football. He is joined at the Principality club by another free agent, Eric Dier, and Barcelona winger Ansu Fati on loan. England international Angel Gomes has also moved, joining Marseille following the expiry of his contract at Lille.

But there is a clear commonality here. The free agent market is the one being exploited most by clubs in Ligue 1, who are financially obliged to scour the market for opportunities.

Marseille, who have also signed England youth international CJ Egan-Riley on a free transfer from Burnley, have openly spoken about their attentiveness to contractual situations. "We've looked at all of the top players who are free agents," admitted OM sporting director Medhi Benatia.

Monaco CEO Thiago Scuro was a little coyer: "Let's remember that free agents have salaries, too," he joked. "They aren't the solution for everything!

"We don't want to step away from our [youth-centric] strategy either. There are some free agent opportunities, but they cost money, they have a salary, and they have an impact on our play style, too. We want to keep our strategy, balance [it out] a bit but not step away from it."

But actions speak louder than words. Pogba and Dier are already through the door; David de Gea was reportedly considered before he opted to remain at Fiorentina; and, at the time of writing, free agent Sergio Reguilon was rumoured to be a target.

Notably, Olivier Giroud has also returned to Ligue 1, joining Lille on a free transfer from LAFC. Both he and Pogba, World Cup winners in 2018, raise the profile of the league. More eyes on the league can drive up TV rights revenue, which can, in turn, ease the financial instability that is dogging all French clubs other than Paris Saint-Germain. In theory, it is a virtuous circle. But the benefits, if they come to pass, will not be felt immediately.

French exit...Rayan Cherki left Lyon for Manchester City

French clubs were informed that, for the coming season, they would have to budget without a single euro of TV rights money

And unlike in previous years, Premier League sides are not necessarily bailing French clubs out. The timing of the Club World Cup saw some clubs hold off on conducting their business, and that change in the ecosystem can be felt further down the food chain.

Aware of the importance of Premier League money keeping the French game afloat, profiles are often developed and adapted according to the needs of English sides, as former Monaco sporting director Paul Mitchell told this writer back in 2023. "It is prudent for any business model that wants sustainability to build profiles that can be positively analysed, reflected and scouted by the biggest clubs in the Premier League," he said.

It means that French clubs are now more reticent to sell to each other, knowing that they can sell on the other side of the Channel at an inflated price. In the event that Premier League clubs don't come knocking, it becomes a vicious cycle that engenders the kind of inertia that has defined the opening weeks of the window in France. Many sides are in a situation of having to "buy to sell", as Franck Haise said, referring to the situation he faces this summer as manager of INEOS-owned Nice. Many clubs are doing neither.

The Club World Cup and the various youth tournaments have decreased activity more generally, and so the dominoes are yet to fall. That is

not to say that there haven't been departures. Strasbourg sold Mamadou Sarr and Habib Diarra to Chelsea and Sunderland respectively, Adrien Truffert joined Bournemouth from Rennes, while Luis Henrique (Marseille to Inter), Lorenz Assignon (Rennes to Stuttgart) and Marcin Bulka (Nice to Neom) also made moves abroad. The biggest transfer, however, was that of Rayan Cherki.

He was earmarked for a move last summer and held talks with PSG and Borussia Dortmund, but ultimately stayed at Lyon. With one year remaining on his deal, a sale was a priority for OL. However, his transfer to Manchester City, which could rise to €42m, could not save the club from a provisional administrative relegation to Ligue 2 in late June.

That decision, taken by the DNCG, was overturned a fortnight later after a successful appeal by the club. With their Ligue 1 status now secure, an era of austerity beckons for the seven-time French champions. They will have to think of more intelligent, low-budget ways to maximise performance and gain a competitive advantage.

And that is not an easy task. Finding value in the current market is difficult, especially when domestic scouting networks have become increasingly purposeless in the context of French clubs' reticence to sell to each other. Europe's top five leagues are no-go zones for the majority of Ligue 1 sides, and clubs have therefore had to cast a wider net.

Nice brought in players from Egypt's top flight and MLS last summer, while Lille have had an increasing focus on the Nordic divisions. The English Championship is now also very much in vogue; if French clubs want to develop profiles to sell to English clubs, then what better way to create the conditions to do that than to recruit players who have developed and played there?

Charlie Cresswell and Jonathan Rowe starred in England Under-21s' victorious European Championship campaign after moving to Ligue 1 last year (Leeds United to Toulouse and Norwich City to Marseille respectively), while Wales midfielder Jordan James joined Rennes from Birmingham City. Since the Euros, both Cresswell and James have been linked with moves to the Premier League. Egan-Riley has already followed them to France this summer, as has Sam Amo-Ameyaw, who completed a €7m move from Southampton to Strasbourg after a successful loan spell.

There is a limit to this English-centric focus, given the league's restrictions on non-EU players, although that does open up opportunities elsewhere. For example, Strasbourg have also signed Irish centre-back Andrew Omobamidele from Nottingham Forest, perhaps in hope that he can emulate one of his international team-mates, Jake O'Brien, who left Lyon for Everton in a £17 million deal last summer.

Regardless, a focus on England's EFL Championship and other "minor" leagues is expected to be an enduring trend.

Meanwhile, peering down on this chaos from their lofty position of dominance are PSG, immune to the internal and external forces that have moulded this evolution within the French transfer window. They are yet to make their move, but when they choose to – and they will – they will have the funds to back it up. In France, they are alone in that category.

In troubled waters, for many of the European champions' domestic rivals, it is more a question of how to survive than thrive. The contrast is stark.

Monaco move...Paul Pogba made an emotional return to football after 18 months out of the game

Back in France ...former Arsenal and Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud has signed for Lille

Jonathan Rowe...Marseille paid Norwich €14.5m for the England Under-21 forward

PETER GWARGIS

"I am nothing special – but here I am treated like Cristiano Ronaldo"

The Australian-born Iraq international sits down with *World Soccer* to reflect on a football journey that has taken him from Sweden to Brighton to Kurdistan

Congratulations on winning the 2024-25 Gulf Club Champions League with your current club, Duhok. Did you always believe you could go all the way?
When I arrived at Duhok, people were saying we should just be aiming not to embarrass ourselves as there were some good teams in the competition. But I knew the coach [Mesut Meral] from Sweden and saw after just a couple of games that we could do something special. When we drew with [UAE side] Al Nasr, the belief started growing. When we beat [Saudi Pro League outfit] Al Ettifaq in the semi-finals, we knew the trophy could be ours.

You scored the winner in the semi-final against Al Ettifaq, whose team included Gini Wijnaldum and other experienced European players. How did that feel?
It was surreal. This is the type of goal you imagine in a storybook: 95 minutes into the game, you pick up the ball and score to win the game and take your team to the final. I can't remember my reaction but I think I was just screaming, celebrating with all of our fans in the arena. It is in these moments when you think: "This is why I really play football." For me personally, having played in Europe, it was particularly enjoyable to prove to myself that I can compete with these types of players like Wijnaldum – to show that I still have this ability.

How much did lifting this trophy mean to the supporters of Duhok?
This was much bigger than football because Iraq as a country has suffered so much and when you are here, you really understand that football means everything to the people. In football terms, I am nothing special – but here I am treated like Cristiano Ronaldo. I cannot go out without people taking pictures. I have to fight with fans to buy food at a restaurant, as they don't want to let me pay.

Before the Gulf Club Champions League final, we got a call from the president of Iraq and the president of Kurdistan. You felt how much this meant. After we won, I think the fans celebrated for two or three weeks straight. The whole city stopped and it really felt like you made them proud. Of course, you always want to win trophies as a footballer but seeing the joy in the faces of these people who have suffered feels something extra.

A few eyebrows were raised when you moved to Iraq to play your club football. How did you come to that decision?
I had my own doubts too. Many people saw a young talent whose career seemed to have stopped. It was a difficult few years because I had loan moves that didn't go right, I had a torn ACL. I thought that if I didn't make a big change I would have just ended up playing in the Swedish Fourth Division. I felt, and feel, like I am still a good player – it was just some of the choices I have made have not been good ones.

When Mesut asked me to go to Duhok he said I would have the freedom to play my football. He expected a lot of me but knew what I can do when I play freely, just enjoy myself and let my creative mind work. He told me we would create history and we did. The love from the people has made settling in easy – if our arena could hold 200,000 people it would be filled every week.

It is almost six years ago that you made your first-team debut for Brighton. What are your memories of that?
Graham Potter was the coach and it was a nice story because when I was 12, I was a ball boy ➤

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North America 2026 hopefuls...Iraq are through to the fourth round of Asian World Cup qualifying

in a game when he was at Ostersunds. Then he ended up being the one to give me my Brighton debut. It was a Carabao Cup match against Aston Villa and it's still one of the best feelings I've had in my career. When I came into the dressing room before the game, he had the starting XI drawn out and it said "PG." I just assumed it was Pascal Gross but the coach told me it was me. I think it was good that I didn't have a day or two to think about it before.

When I got out there and I saw Jack Grealish and Douglas Luiz – it was like: "S***, I'm really here". But as soon as the game started, I remember having no problem fighting with Grealish. After the game, I spoke to [then-Aston Villa assistant] John Terry in the tunnel. He said: "Good game, young lad" and I was in shock. It was a proud moment for me. It felt after that little taste that I was close – I just wanted more.

What was it like working with Graham Potter?
You could really see that Graham was in that top bracket of managers because of how deeply he understands football. Tactically he is so smart but also I had a great dynamic with him – he made me feel, even though I was young, that I was a part of everything. He spent a lot of hours of studying football and made Brighton one of the best teams in the Premier League in terms of ball possession – something they have carried on until now.

Why did you end up leaving Brighton?
I was offered a new contract but it didn't feel as though I was getting closer to playing regularly so I turned it down. Honestly, it is the only thing I regret in my life. To other young players I would say, don't think you're something and that you can do whatever you want just because you have played a few good games. The club is always bigger than the player.

I was in the final year of my contract and I really wanted to go on loan to play but the club said no unless I signed a new deal. Then there were some Dutch clubs interested in signing me but Brighton rejected the offers. At that time I was in a really bad place mentally. I didn't understand what was happening and I wish I had somebody who could have helped me and told me not to give up. But I did. I stopped fighting, I didn't train as hard. It was lockdown in England and it was such a bad time. But I really regret that I gave up so fast. That year of my career just fell away. I should have swallowed my pride and kept fighting.

> "When I got out there and I saw Jack Grealish and Douglas Luiz – it was like: 'S***, I'm really here'"

Even though it somewhat ended on a bad note, you must have learned a lot from your three years in England at Brighton?
Absolutely. Every day I was playing with incredible players like Alexis Mac Allister. You could see the difference between good players and elite, Premier League players. It was just so rare that they would miss a pass, and the touch was always right. Everything was always happening so quickly on the pitch. Having come from the second division in Sweden I was nervous about the step up. But because your team-mates are so good, it makes it easier to slip into that tempo yourself. Obviously this helped me become a better player and not many people get that experience, especially where I come from. I will always be very grateful for my time at Brighton.

Both of your parents were born in Iraq, and you made your debut for the national team last December alongside your childhood friend Amir Al Ammari. How special was that?
It was a crazy feeling because I've known Amir since I was four or five years old – we grew up next door to each other in Jonkoping. He has played for Iraq for a little while now but we came on together as substitutes [in the Arabian Gulf Cup match against Yemen]. He's always been like a big brother to me and knowing our families were watching was amazing.

When did you first start to think about playing for Iraq?
I honestly didn't really think about international football at all when I was younger. I played for the Sweden youth teams but to me it was just a checkpoint to say that I was at a good level. I think when I was around 17 and getting my

Iraq international... Gwargis in action against Kuwait in March

Influential...then-Seagulls manager Graham Potter at the end of Gwargis' senior debut for Brighton in September 2019

name out there a bit, people found out about the Iraq connection and then I had Iraqi fans messaging me every day. Being here now, it is easier to understand. It's a national team, it's a country and it's your people; you're representing a lot more than a club.

Iraq haven't played at the World Cup since 1986 but is still in with a shot at reaching the 2026 tournament. What would it mean for you and your team-mates to qualify?

The whole country will stop, for sure. It's the only thing you hear walking on the streets – everything is about the World Cup. Many of the players have been on a long journey with the national team and they know that this team can do it. We have the experience and our new coach Graham Arnold does too. He knows our opponents so I think we are in safe hands. We are ready to make history for Iraq.

Interview by Mark Lomas

KIERON LOVELADY

"It does you the world of good, going out and seeing different types of football"

The 27-year-old English coach has already enjoyed a unique career. Here, he talks about his journey thus far and future aspirations…

You started coaching at a very young age. Did you initially have ambitions to make it as a player?
I played for local teams. I was just on the cusp of making it into an academy, and had trials at Blackburn and Everton, but it never worked out. But I was also heavily involved in the coaching side from a young age, and had an influence on team selection.

What was your journey into coaching?
Towards the end of my school education, I built a plan for myself which would eventually lead me to coaching. I found out about the Robbie Fowler Academy, where I was part of the first cohort. While I was a student there, I took over at Southport Under-18s, where we competed in the North-West Youth Alliance League, which we won, and the FA Youth Cup.

Was it difficult gaining the respect of the Southport players given that they were a similar age to you?
Gaining the players' respect came easily having known them for many years. They believed in the work I was doing on the grass and they bought into the clear style of play that I brought. Something I value highly is man-management and building strong relationships with players and I found it easy to gain respect. Every player at every level at every club has a different motivation and it is about tapping into that and, ultimately, being a good people person.

After that, you moved up the football pyramid to Rochdale, Preston North End, and then Manchester City, where you spent three years. How did that come about?
When I was at Rochdale and Preston, I also worked for City under its City Select programme, which is essentially a feeder system for its academy. An opportunity then arose for me at City on a permanent basis when I was 25. I spent much of my time with Brian Barry-Murphy [recently appointed as Cardiff City's head coach], who was the Under-23s manager, and I learned a lot from him.

Who are your coaching influences?
Away from the tactical side, the one that stands out for me is Graham Potter. I am a huge fan of his journey and how he started out in the Swedish fourth division with Ostersunds and led them into Europe. I think if things had been different at Chelsea, he would have been a success there. I like his principles and how he wants the game played.

You moved to Turkey earlier this year to join Mustafa Alper Avci's coaching staff at Adana Demirspor. How did that arise?
Mustafa worked with me at Manchester City. When he first arrived, his English wasn't the best so we did a lot of coaching when we worked together. He'd said early on that there would be an opportunity to go back to the Turkish Super Lig and that he would love for me to come with him, so it all came to fruition. But he also warned me that there was a high turnover of managers in Turkey.

How did you find the standard of the Turkish Super Lig?
The standard is very high – it's ranked the ninth best in Europe. Adana had multiple transfer bans and multiple points deductions, so we had to sell a number of high-profile players and gave debuts to a lot of players from the academy. There was no expectation on us. Ultimately, we did what we could to develop the players for next season.

In our second game we were away at Galatasaray. We started well, having worked hard on our defensive structure. They had Alvaro Morata and Victor Osimhen as the two number nines and Dries Mertens as a number ten. After 15 minutes, a penalty was awarded to Galatasaray and it went to VAR and remained a penalty – even though it wasn't. A message from our sporting director came down for us to walk off the pitch and the game was then abandoned after 30 minutes. It went down as a 3-0 win to Galatasaray, which led to a further points deduction for us.

How difficult was it to settle in a new country and all the challenges that it brings?
In Turkey there are a lot of stories about its football scene and how volatile it is, so I wanted to make sure there would be an actual contract for me to sign. I briefed my family while I waited a week for it. I then signed the contract, with City giving me the grace to leave with it being such an amazing opportunity – I was very happy to have left on such good terms.

Me and the other coaches lived at the training ground and there were things that were done differently on the football side, so I had to learn all about that. I was on Duolingo every day, so I became pretty competent in Turkish. I also built good relationships with the squad, who were mainly Turkish, while there were also French players who spoke good English. It was a real challenge, but a fantastic one. I am sure the experience will shape me and I will refer back to it during the rest of my career.

It must have been a boost when another British coach, Dean Holden, joined the staff?
I built an amazing relationship with him, which made everything easier. His sons were in the City Select programme and when Mustafa took the

job he was looking for an assistant. Dean had just finished being a number two to Steven Gerrard at Al Ettifaq in Saudi Arabia and was open to coming to Turkey. He was someone I learned so much from in a short space of time.

What are your ambitions moving forward? Do you want to manage a team?
Management is something I want to do at some stage – that is the end goal. I appreciate that I am young and have a lot to learn, so I am not in a rush. I would be more than open to working in lower leagues abroad, as well as the National League or League Two in England. But I am happy right now to continue to be a coach and learn my trade.

Why do you think more British coaches should try their luck abroad?
It does you the world of good, going out and seeing different types of football. I would say to younger coaches, start networking and broaden your horizons and be prepared to take a leap of faith. Now that I have coached first-team football in Turkey, I am open to any opportunities that come my way.

Interview by Simon Yaffe

6 of the best

Euro Under-21 starlets

While some of Europe's best young talents spent the summer in the US for the Club World Cup, there were plenty of other standout stars in action at the European U21 Championship, says **Lukas Vrablik**…

1 Harvey ELLIOTT

ENGLAND

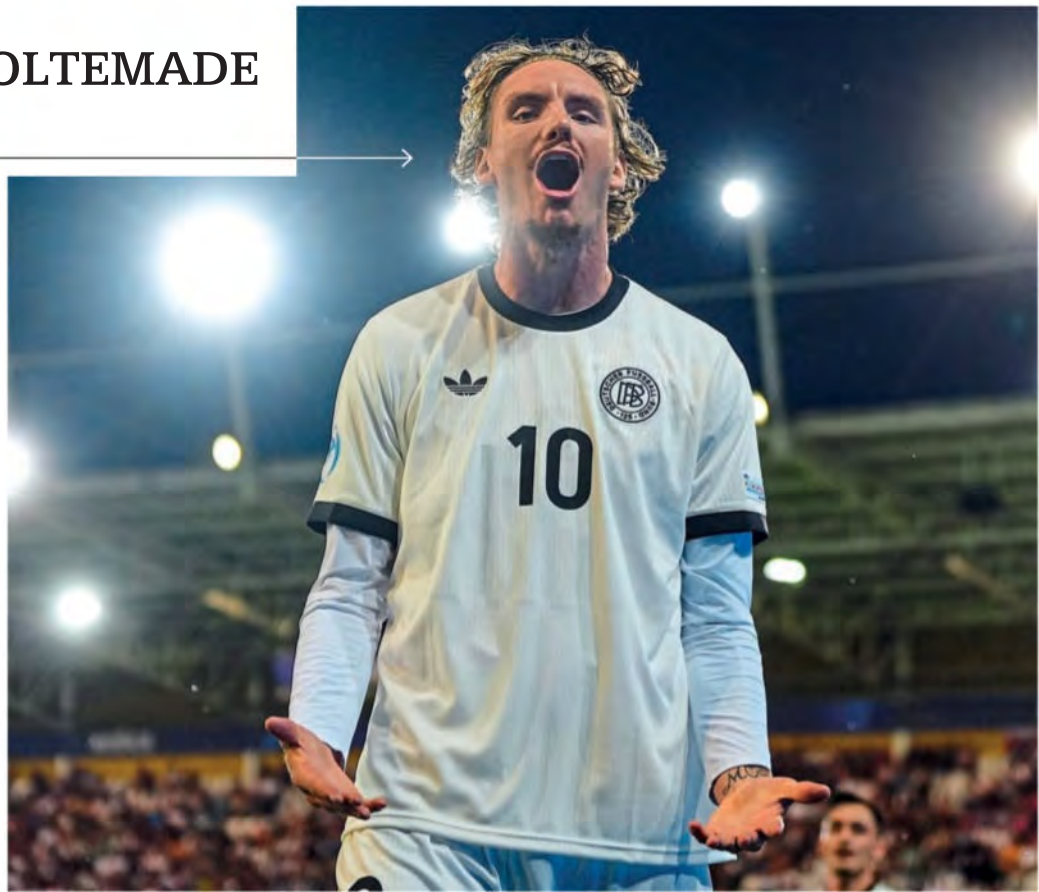
These finals were two-and-a-half weeks of Elliott excellence. After the final victory against Germany, the versatile attacker enjoyed the moment on the pitch, posing with the trophy to a group of pitchside photographers. There was a lot of happiness afterwards, too – as he gave a lengthy interview to a group of journalists in the mixed zone, his team-mate Jarell Quansah walked by and shouted: "MVP!"

That status could only have been disputed at this tournament by Nick Woltemade (below), but the Germany striker failed to deliver in the final while Elliott stepped up with a crisply struck opening goal.

A highly versatile asset for coach Lee Carsley, Elliott usually played as one of the attacking trio. As well as scoring in the final, he also scored with two beautiful strikes in the semi-final against the Netherlands.

2 Nick WOLTEMADE

GERMANY



The championship's top scorer with six goals was visibly disappointed when collecting his Golden Boot after losing the final. Still, the tournament served as Woltemade's introduction to the global football stage.

The Stuttgart striker was a key part of Germany's attack, bringing not just an aerial presence – he stands tall at 6ft 6in – but also solid technique and a good understanding of space, frequently dropping in between the lines. That kind of versatility has brought praise, including from his club coach Sebastian Hoeness.

Like Harvey Elliott, there's a chance that Woltemade will have changed clubs by the end of the summer transfer window. The 23-year-old, who scored 12 Bundesliga goals last season, has already been capped at senior level and looks destined to be an important player for Germany.

3 Geovany QUENDA

PORTUGAL

The 18-year-old wing wizard was the star boy of a Portugal side that was disappointingly beaten in the quarter-finals by the Netherlands. In Slovakia, Quenda showed why he's *A Selecao's* next big thing, scoring three times, including one of the goals of the tournament against Poland.

Only last year, he was playing for his nation's Under-17s, named in the Team of the Tournament at the Euro U17 finals as Portugal finished runners-up. Shortly after, he was called up to the senior team with head coach Roberto Martinez full of praise for the teenager.

In March, Sporting announced that they had agreed a deal in principle for Quenda to move to Chelsea in the summer of 2026 for a reported £40 million fee.

4 Eric MARTEL

GERMANY

While Nick Woltemade was the poster boy for Germany's run to the final, Martel was the orchestrator who made things happen behind him. The tall midfielder was vital in how Germany pressed and won the ball back, and was then able to switch play or quickly get the ball up the pitch to his fast team-mates in attack.

Martel also wore the captain's armband and fulfilled his leadership role on the pitch, helping to direct the game plan of head coach Antonio Di Salvo.

The final defeat was the 23-year-old's 30th appearance for Germany at Under-21 level, one short of the all-time record held by Fabian Ernst. He is still waiting for a senior debut, but it is surely only a matter of time after his displays in Slovakia.

5 Quentin MERLIN

FRANCE

There was disappointment in France as they lost in the semi-final against Germany, but there is no doubt that they have another strong generation emerging, with captain Merlin among the biggest prospects.

The attack-minded left-back, who has played in all of France's youth national team categories, was an important part of the team's system, relentlessly supporting the offence with his energy from deep, particularly when scoring in the quarter-final against Denmark. His form earned him a spot in UEFA's Team of the Tournament – one of only two non-finalists, along with Quenda, to be included.

The 23-year-old has been an important member of the Marseille team since moving from Nantes last January, and at this tournament he proved how well he has matured.

6 Elliot ANDERSON

ENGLAND

Midfield lynchpin who provided the platform for the likes of Elliott, James McAtee and winger Omari Hutchinson to shine in attack. Carsley relied heavily on the Nottingham Forest midfielder – and perhaps next summer Thomas Tuchel will do, too.

Anderson showed his importance by controlling the midfield, combining technique with positional discipline and physical resilience. He excelled in a deeper role – the very position where the senior side may well have a vacancy long term.

Red Bull

The most prominent multi-club ownership group in the world has evolved significantly since embarking on its footballing journey 20 years ago, writes Steve Menary

Red Bull has become synonymous with multi-club ownership in football since the soft drinks manufacturer acquired Salzburg Sport in 2005.

A string of further acquisitions soon followed, including Major League Soccer's New York MetroStars in 2006 and the German fifth-tier side SSV Markranstadt from Leipzig in 2009. All three were renamed and rebranded to become instantly recognisable as part of the Red Bull group.

Outside of the City Football Group, there are only a handful of portfolios to rival the holdings of the Austrian-based Red Bull, which has also invested in ice hockey and Formula One teams.

The football operations are run by the triumvirate of Oliver Mintzlaff, Jurgen

RED BULL SPONSORSHIPS

Clubs: Red Bull Salzburg, Liefering (both Austria), New York Red Bulls (United States), RB Leipzig (Germany), Red Bull Bragantino (Brazil) & RB Omiya Ardija (Japan)
Minority ownership stake & front of shirt/exclusive energy drink partner: Leeds United (England)
Official energy drink partner: Fulham, West Ham United, Crystal Palace, Newcastle United, Nottingham Forest, Everton (all England), Torino (Italy), Atletico Madrid (Spain) & Western United (Australia)

Red Bull clubs... (from left to right) RB Leipzig, New York Red Bulls and Salzburg

Klopp and Mario Gomez. Klopp, one of the world's most recognised football managers courtesy of stints at Borussia Dortmund and Liverpool, is Red Bull's head of global soccer, while ex-Germany international striker Gomez is technical director. Mintzlaff, a former long-distance runner and chief executive officer of RB Leipzig, is CEO of corporate projects and new investments at Red Bull.

Since this trio assumed control, there has been a change of tack. Instead of adding more and more clubs to the group, smaller stakes have been acquired in clubs as part of larger takeovers, while there has also been a growth in "partnership" deals.

Officially, Salzburg are only a sponsorship partner, and they are known as FC Salzburg when playing in

Red Bull colleagues...Jurgen Klopp and Mario Gomez attend a Paris FC game last season

FIFA and UEFA competitions, which is how both they and RB Leipzig managed to take part in the 2017-18 Champions League. Since then, UEFA has forced a number of clubs with the same owners into divestments or to put stakes into blind trusts in an ad hoc approach to regulating MCO, and the result has been a wider growth in partnership deals.

Red Bull's recent approach to partnerships has varied. The company bought into Leeds United at the end of the 2023-24 season, and then into Ligue 2 side Paris FC in October 2024. In both cases, Red Bull were investing in new ownership groups.

49ers Enterprises – the investment arm of NFL franchise the San Francisco 49ers – acquired Leeds United for £170 million in 2023 and Red Bull took an unspecified stake a year later. At Paris, French businessman Bernard Arnault's Agache Sport took a 52.4 per cent stake, with 10.6 per cent acquired by Red Bull GmbH, while the club's existing owner Pierre Ferracci retained a 29.8 per cent stake.

While Red Bull continues to ignore any attempts to explore their strategy, both Paris FC and Leeds have been keen to underline that the partnerships are not like Leipzig and Salzburg, and there have been no attempts to push through changes in badge, name and team colours.

Leeds United set up an interview between chairman Paraag Marathe and *The Athletic* solely to push through this exact message: "This club is and will forever be Leeds United Football Club. It's not going to be the Leeds Red Bulls," declared Marathe. "To be fair, they [Red Bull] understand that. They appreciate that. They respect that. They know the legacy of this club, so it's not something they wanted either."

Ferracci was equally keen to dismiss ideas of Red Bull Paris: "We're not going to be drawn into multi-club ownership. The Arnault family are the majority shareholders in this deal," Ferracci told the *BBC*.

Since those deals were agreed, Red Bull has continued to search for new partnerships. In November 2024, it bought out the majority stake held in Japanese third-tier side, Omiya Ardija, by subsidiary of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp. The deal made Omiya Ardija the country's first majority foreign-owned club, after a rule banning overseas ownership was removed in 2020.

Unlike Paris and Leeds, the majority ownership stake has allowed Red Bull to rename the club RB Omiya Ardija, with the acronym again standing for RasenBallsport (the German word for "Lawn ball sports") and the Saitama-based club's logo of a squirrel is being replaced by the soft drinks company's ubiquitous two red bulls.

After running away with the third-tier title in 2024, Omiya Ardija are now in the J2 League and in with a chance of successive promotions, making Red Bull's ambition of vying for the J1 League title by 2030 look realistic.

Red Bull's next deal represented another change of tack. In March 2025, a partnership was agreed with Egyptian giants Al Ahly, with the focus expected to range from providing sports science input to player conditioning and training for the Cairo side, alongside international marketing campaigns to connect Al Ahly

Crossover...Leeds players pose with Red Bull's F1 driver Max Verstappen in 2024

"This club is and will forever be Leeds United Football Club. It's not going to be the Leeds Red Bulls"

Leeds United chairman Paraag Marathe on Red Bull's investment in the club

supporters around the world to the Red Bull brand.

"The case of Red Bull and Al Ahly appears to be primarily driven by commercial and marketing reasons," says Fernando Roitman, founder of consultancy CIES Sports Intelligence.

With 49ers Enterprises acquiring a majority stake in Rangers in May 2025, Red Bull's links are expected to lead to a shirt sponsorship deal with the Scottish giants in a country where the soft drink has significant competition from local favourite, Irn-Bru.

Red Bull sold 12.7 billion cans of its omnipresent energy drink in 2024, but faces strong competition from the likes of Monster and old favourite Lucozade. This challenge appears to be having some influence on the football strategy with Red Bull inking a string of deals as official energy drink partner, particularly in the English Premier League.

Monster Energy has deals with eight Premier League clubs, including long-term partnerships with Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool, but last year the company was supplanted as official energy drink supplier at West Ham United and Newcastle United.

Red Bull also ousted Lucozade at Everton, and signed deals in continental Europe and Australia, but the entry into England was the most striking.

Last year, Adam Lewis, an analyst at research consultancy Ampere Analysis, said: "Red Bull has adopted a unique strategy for entering the UK, tactically

Marketing partnership ...Al Ahly and Red Bull have joined forces

Energy drink partner...Nottingham Forest are one of a number of Premier League clubs to have struck a partnership with Red Bull

partnering with multiple clubs across football. With five deals so far with Premier League clubs and part ownership of Leeds United, this is a resolute investment into a key market for the brand."

The commercial crossovers have extended into Leeds United stars Willy Gnonto, Largie Ramazani and Isaac Schmidt racing a Red Bull car across the pitch at the club's Elland Road Stadium in June.

Japanese connection... a flag bearing Omiya Ardija's old badge

Driver Arvid Lindblad beat the footballers, but the real winner was Red Bull, as the energy drink used its expansion into sport for yet more advertising. That line looks set to be blurred further in the future.

Club partnerships on the rise

Growth in multi-club ownership takeovers has slowed, with many of the most recent deals having been agreed by consortia, which take longer to put together. But partnerships between clubs are surging.

Fernando Roitman, founder of consultancy CIES Sports Intelligence, says: "A partnership may sometimes be preferred because it allows to achieve some of the goals typically associated to an MCO investment – particularly in the areas like player scouting and development – but with a much smaller financial commitment (or perhaps none at all) and without tying up capital in the long-term.

"I believe a partnership may also offer greater flexibility in the definition of the terms of the agreement, such as its duration and the specific areas of focus or objectives it sets out to pursue.

"Potentially, partnerships may also be an alternative to stake acquisitions in cases where regulatory frameworks make such investments impractical, or where they may not represent the optimal solution due to the context, structure and traditions surrounding the clubs involved."

A swathe of English Premier League clubs are already tied up in MCO consortia and there have been 20 partnerships agreed by clubs in the 2024-25 EPL, according to research by Jason Stephens, a senior lecturer at University Campus of Football Business in London.

In many cases, these are agreements struck by clubs that are already owned by MCO groups. AFC Bournemouth is owned by the Black Knight group, which has developed partnerships with Japan's Kyoto Sanga and MLS franchise Orlando City rather than looking to purchase a stake. Brentford took a similar route with their strategic partnership with Gil Vicente in Portugal.

Partnerships allow clubs to enter and exit new markets quickly, says Stephens, who explains: "Technical partnerships eliminate acquisition costs or investment. Club partnerships can be financially lucrative for the bigger clubs while the investing club can gain a long-term return on investment."

Fans also take a more sympathetic view to a partnership with another club as opposed to a takeover, which is another reason why these relationships look likely to continue to grow in the future.

Glenn Moore

Ups and downs of the WSL

An overview of the women's domestic game ahead of the WSL embarking on its 15th season

By the conclusion of the 2024-25 campaign, England's Women's Super League featured the reigning European champions in Arsenal, the world's most expensive female player in Chelsea's US defender Naomi Girma, and then at Euro 2025 had nearly 100 players, twice as many as any other country.

But it also has its problems: a lack of competitive balance, plateauing crowd growth, and financial worries that have led to Reading and Blackburn Rovers voluntarily dropping out of the second tier and Wolverhampton Wanderers rejecting the chance to enter.

So is the WSL on course to realise its stated ambitions of being the "world's first £1 billion women's football league", as veteran media boss Dawn Airey declared in 2023? Can it become "the most distinctive, competitive and entertaining women's football club competition in the world," as ex-Nike executive Nikki Doucet vowed in 2024? Or is it suffering from hubris and trying to grow too quickly?

> Is the WSL on course to realise its stated ambitions, or is it suffering from hubris and trying to grow too quickly?

Airey and Doucet are, respectively, the chair and chief executive of WSL Football, the new stand-alone entity that runs the WSL having been hived off from its creators, the Football Association, last year.

The governing body launched the league, after a couple of false starts, as a semi-professional summer competition in 2011.

Of the original eight teams, only Arsenal and Chelsea have been ever-presents, though founding members Everton and Liverpool are also in the current 12-team league.

Doncaster Rovers Belles, once the most successful women's team in England, immediately struggled to meet the financial demands and now operate in the fourth tier. Lincoln City upped sticks 40 miles to become Notts County after three years, then, while still a top-flight team, were dissolved by the men's parent club.

These themes have been a constant even as the league has grown. Until this year all teams, to a greater or lesser extent, have remained dependent on the support of their men's club.

Next season, however, the 20th team to feature in the top flight will also be the first independent of a men's club – London City Lionesses, part of the growing stable of US health mogul Michele Kang.

Kang's backing should ensure LCL are competitive; the challenge will be attracting supporters. With the exception of second-tier Durham, another independent outfit, every other club can tap into the support that already follows a men's team.

No one does that better than Arsenal, long trailblazers in the women's game, and the inaugural champions. Back in 2011, their league-leading support was around 200 fans. They now average close to 30,000, three times any other club, and frequently draw 50,000-plus to the Emirates. As a result, they have announced they will stage all of their WSL home games in 2025-26 at the Emirates, with long-standing home Meadow Lane hosting domestic cup matches and the league-phase games in the new-look Champions League.

WSL disruptors ...London City Lionesses celebrate their promotion to the top flight

Kang will draw succour from Doucet's view that most fans of women's football are relatively new, many with allegiances yet to be defined.

Certainly, there are more fans of players (especially England's Lionesses) than in the men's game where UK support is very club-orientated. There are also plenty who do not follow a men's team, though the initial approach of targeting mums and daughters has matured after discovering fans were just as likely to be men and boys who simply liked football. This core has been augmented by those drawn in by England's success.

While gates declined ten per cent last year to 6,642, they remain the highest in Europe – and the decline was largely due to Bristol City's relegation and the lack of bump that usually comes with England playing in a major summer tournament.

Revenues continue to grow, but so do losses as income is soaked up by rising wages. In that respect, the WSL is much like the English men's game in which few clubs at any level make a profit, again mainly due to wage increases.

So, to Airey's ambition for the competition to be the first £1bn women's football league. It looks as if the United States' NWSL has already got there, but the WSL are certainly not far behind.

Forbes estimates the collective value of the American league's 14 teams to be £1.375bn, led by Angel City at £205 million.

WSL giants...European champions Arsenal and perennial title winners Chelsea

That is a similar price to the WSL's most valuable club, Chelsea. Now technically independent of the men's team, a stake worth between eight and ten per cent was bought for £20m by Reddit founder Alexis Ohanian in May. Other valuations are also similar, to judge from the recent sale of Seattle Reign for £43m and a stake in Aston Villa valuing the mid-table WSL club at £55m.

NWSL's headline TV income, at £46m-a-year, appears well in excess of WSL's £13m-a-year deal, but when production and marketing aspects are taken into account the gap is regarded as slim.

WSL revenues are expected to top £100m in the coming season; NWSL revenues are predicted by *Forbes* at £150m. Though all their clubs except Kansas City Current are tipped to lose money this season, US economic power suggests the NWSL will continue to pull ahead.

What about Doucet's desire to be "the most distinctive, competitive and entertaining" league? Distinctive and entertaining are subjective, but when it comes to competitiveness the NWSL is streets ahead, and not just because of the post-season play-offs.

In the last five years, the NWSL has had five different champions; Chelsea have won the last six WSL titles. Moreover, in the last decade only Chelsea, Arsenal and the Manchester clubs have finished in the top three – with United displacing City twice.

While others have tried to bridge the gap, there were 15 points between City in fourth and Brighton in fifth last season, which is significant in a 22-match league.

The league has just completed a review, which considered a variety of solutions. They settled for increasing the top flight from 12 to 14 teams from 2026-27 with a promotion play-off. That recognised the bottleneck that one-up one-down was creating as clubs such as Newcastle United came to the party.

The 2025-26 season, then, will see the top two from WSL 2 automatically promoted with the third-place finishers facing a play-off against the WSL's bottom club. Thereafter there will be one-up and one-down, with a play-off between the 13th-placed WSL club and the WSL 2 runners-up.

This should all lead to the WSL becoming more competitive. The sums involved are very modest by Premier League standards. Conversely, as the NWSL liberalises player movement, drops the draft and softens the salary cap to prevent talent heading to Europe, it may become less so. The one certainty is the value of both leagues will keep rising.

Round-up

Champions League chase ...Manchester United are hoping to reach the group stage for the first time

DUTCH START FOR UNITED'S EUROPEAN CHALLENGE

Manchester United's attempt to reach the Champions League for the first time will begin with a one-off match against PSV in Sweden. The winners will meet either mini-tournament hosts Hammarby or Ukraine's Metalist Kharkiv. The only previous European foray by the Red Devils ended with defeat to Paris Saint-Germain at this stage in 2023.

Other mini-tournament ties include Internazionale/SK Brann v Braga/Valur and Roma/Aktobe v Sparta Prague/Nordsjaelland. The winners will advance to a third qualifying round at which point seven clubs, including Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid, enter.

Holders Arsenal, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Benfica, Chelsea, Juventus, OL Lyonnes, PSG and Wolfsburg have direct entry into the new 18-team league phase, modelled like the men's.

OL LYONNES ROAR IN SUMMER TRADING

Michele Kang's clubs made the early moves in the summer transfer window with OL Lyonnes swiftly following the signing of PSG's Marie-Antoinette Katoto with Wolfsburg's Jule Brand and Barcelona's Ingrid Engen, while ex-Arsenal midfielder Danielle van de Donk left OL to return to the WSL with newly promoted sister club London City Lionesses.

At Real Madrid, ex-OL full-back Sara Dabritz arrived while World Cup-winning goalscorer Olga Carmona left Spain for PSG. Australia's Ellie Carpenter also left OL, for Chelsea, with Canada defender Ashley Lawrence moving in the opposite direction. Wolfsburg duo Kathrin Hendrich and Sveindis Jonsdottir went to Chicago Stars and Angel City respectively and Manchester City pair Jill Roord and Laia Aleixandri went home to Twente and Barcelona.

Other moves included Denmark defender Sara Holmgaard joining Real Madrid from Everton, Italian striker Agnese Bonfantini making her loan from Juventus to Fiorentina permanent (joining ex-Arsenal forward Lina Hurtig), and Roma's Moeka Minami becoming Brighton's latest Japanese recruit.

JEGLERTZ FOR CITY, POTTER FOR PALACE

After coaching Denmark at Euro 2025, Andree Jeglertz will become the new Manchester City manager. The veteran Swede oversaw Umea's UEFA Women's Cup (Champions League) success in 2004.

Next Manchester City boss ...Andree Jeglertz

Jo Potter, the former England midfielder, has left Rangers to manage newly relegated Crystal Palace in WSL 2. Potter oversaw a cup double both seasons she was in charge in Glasgow.

BENGAL TIGRESSES REACH 2026 ASIAN CUP

Bangladesh will compete in the Asian Cup for the first time after qualifying for next year's finals. So will India, who knocked out Thailand, World Cup qualifiers in 2015 and 2019, with a shock 2-1 win in Chiang Mai.

The duo join hosts Australia, defending champions China, Japan, South Korea, Chinese Taipei, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Philippines and North Korea. One qualifying group was delayed due to geopolitics.

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Champions of the world

Chelsea show signs of their intent with victory in the United States

How fitting that Chelsea owner Todd Boehly should see his club crowned world champions in his homeland. Boehly, a major shareholder in a pair of Stateside sporting institutions (baseball's LA Dodgers and the LA Lakers basketball franchise), now has clambered to the top of the soccer world with the Stamford Bridge side.

Boehly has received no end of brickbats in the English media for his "if it moves, buy it" approach to transfers. But he must be doing something right if Chelsea can so comprehensively outmanoeuvre the previously all-conquering Paris Saint-Germain, who had just blown away Atletico Madrid, Bayern Munich and Real Madrid and were seeking the fourth-leg of a quadruple after triumphs in the Champions League, Ligue 1 and Coupe de France.

MVP... Cole Palmer poses with the Golden Ball award

With world-class talents such as attacking midfielder Cole Palmer, winger Pedro Neto and engine room anchor Moises Caicedo at their disposal plus a great supporting cast, Chelsea have every reason to believe in a bright tomorrow. They plainly are made of the right stuff mentally and have a deep reservoir of

Nick Bidwell

ABOVE: Instant impact...Joao Pedro scores against his old club Fluminense in the semi-final

LEFT: Champions... captain Reece James lifts the FIFA Club World Cup trophy

untapped potential. They were the second-youngest squad at the Club World Cup, with an average age of 22.7 years and no one older than 27.

Full marks to Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca. Often ridiculed this past season by a hardcore group of Chelsea fans, he most definitely has had the last laugh. His tactics against PSG – the high hunting of the ball, the directness and well-executed gameplan to target the Parisians' left flank – worked a treat and he deserves special praise for his shrewd team rotation throughout the tournament, using all 26 of his outfield players, plus both goalkeepers, at one point or another.

So was FIFA's latest brainchild a success? According to FIFA president Gianni Infantino, yes. Speaking ahead of the final he said: "The golden era of global club football has started. We can say definitely that this FIFA Club World Cup has been a huge, huge, huge success. Of course, there are a lot of positives, some negatives."

Perhaps the best response would be to liken it to the proverbial curate's egg, the excellent elements mixed in with the bad.

While crowd figures in the USA clearly improved as the stakes rose in the last-eight onwards, a million empty seats in the group stage was hardly a Klondike-style gold rush. Of the 48 games in the opening round, only 25 were played at a stadium more than half-full and attendance figures were pitifully low in places.

An average group-phase attendance of almost 35,000 was a respectable return – 10,000 more than in the last MLS campaign – but even in the round of 16, the hunger for tickets just did not materialise, with four of the eight stadia at less than 50 per cent capacity.

> The critics no doubt will draw a veil over the abundance of high-quality, entertaining play at this summer's tournament

Only in the quarter-finals did the fans truly show up. Three of the four ties were witnessed by near-full houses and in the semi-finals too, both held at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, the spectators piled in.

It speaks volumes that the finals' organisers were forced to slash ticket prices for certain encounters. For two of the quarter-finals (Fluminense versus Al Hilal in Orlando and Chelsea's clash with Palmeiras in New Jersey), the going rate tumbled to $11.50 per ticket, while in the case of the Chelsea-Fluminense semi-final, prices were cut from a whopping $473.90 to just $13.40.

Ironically, sluggish box-office appeal only rarely put a dampener on the atmosphere at the grounds. The fans who did attend came to seriously party, bringing noise, colour and unbridled passion to proceedings. South American fans, brought up never to be indifferent to intercontinental club combat, needed no encouragement whatsoever to turn up the volume, as did the faithful of Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan), Wydad (Morocco), Inter Miami and the Mexicans of Monterrey. Outside of UEFA land, supporters clearly wanted to embrace the shiny new-fangled format.

Detractors of the Club World Cup – and they are hardly a minority in Europe – will not back down. FIFPro, the world players' union, are in no mood to stop screaming about elite professionals burn-out; Jurgen Klopp is hardly likely to U-turn on his description of the competition as "the worst idea ever". And irascible Spanish league president Javier Tebas can be relied upon to double down on his opposition: "Our schedules are wrecked and the pro football ecosystem severely damaged."

The critics no doubt will draw a veil over the abundance of high-quality, entertaining play at this summer's tournament. PSG's 4-0 thumping of Real Madrid in the semi-finals was a masterclass in modern football and, just to please the romantics, shock results abounded, notably Al Hilal's 4-3 win over Manchester City in the last 16, Fluminense upsetting Internazionale at the same stage, Flamengo beating Chelsea in the group round and Inter Miami defeating Porto thanks to a Messi masterclass.

Right until the end, the underdogs were biting back hard, champions Chelsea the prime example.

Thrills and spills in knockout rounds

Upset...Phil Foden reacts to Manchester City's shock 4-3 defeat to Al Hilal

LAST 16

Al Hilal, superbly marshalled by new head coach Simone Inzaghi, pulled off a seismic shock in seeing off Club World Cup holders Manchester City in a seven-goal, 120-minute thriller in Florida. The former Internazionale boss rightly oozed satisfaction from every pore in the wake of his team's sensational 4-3 extra-time victory over Pep Guardiola's charges.

"We knew we would have to do something extraordinary against a team like Manchester City," said the Italian. "We knew we had to climb Mount Everest without oxygen and we were great."

When Brazilian attacker Marcos Leonardo popped up at the back post to bundle home the winner against City after a back-and-forth encounter, it was not merely a totally unexpected triumph on the night for the Riyadh-based club and a golden ticket for the last eight, it was a result that also could have wider significance for the hierarchy of world football. Could the game in Asia, funded by petro-dollars galore, suddenly be in a position to challenge the hegemony of the Europeans and South Americans?

While it's far too early to say, there can be no doubt that Al Hilal made history in dispatching City. This was the first time an Asian side had beaten European opponents in an official FIFA tournament, ending a 20-match sequence of 18 wins and two draws in Europe's favour.

In terms of national representation, Germany and Brazil emerged as the most productive of this summer's finals, each spawning two quarter-finalists. Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund both took the tournament extremely seriously and had to show plenty of character to prevail in the round of 16. Despite the 4-2 scoreline (with two goals by Harry Kane, taking his season's tally to 41), Bayern were severely tested by 2022 Copa Libertadores champions Flamengo, and Dortmund had anything but an easy ride in the 2-1 win against Monterrey of Mexico who, after going 2-0 down in the first half, had the Ruhr team hanging on at the end.

Brazil's two representatives in the quarter-finals, Palmeiras and Fluminense, clearly relish battling the odds. Palmeiras – for whom substitute Paulinho scored the only goal of the game in extra-time versus fellow countrymen Botafogo – had not beaten the reigning Copa Libertadores holders in their five previous meetings, and Flu were certainly not favourites to beat Internazionale. The Brazilian phrase *"jogo bonito"* may not apply to the way Flu go about their business – they are certainly not the most flamboyant of sides. But they definitely know how to graft, defend and make a gameplan work. A mysteriously off-key Inter made for easy prey as Fluminense displayed grit and team spirit galore.

A trio of Champions League winners completed the qualifier list: Real Madrid, whose revelation striker Gonzalo Garcia scored again in a 1-0 win over Juventus; PSG, comprehensive 4-0 victors over Inter Miami and their former star Leo Messi; and Chelsea, whose 4-1 extra-time win against Benfica took four-and-a-half hours to conclude because of a thunderstorm warning in Charlotte.

QUARTER-FINALS

PSG's hard-earned 2-0 victory over Bayern Munich – in which the former had Willian Pacho and Lucas Hernandez red-carded late on – was overshadowed by an horrendous injury to Bayern star Jamal Musiala, who broke his leg and dislocated an ankle in a collision with opposition goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. Musiala, only recently restored to the first team after missing the back-end of last season with a severe hamstring problem, is likely to be out for the foreseeable future. Donnarumma appeared visibly shaken in the wake of the incident – as did several of Musiala's Bayern team-mates.

Acrobatic finish ...Kylian Mbappe scores v Dortmund

Another goalkeeper making headlines was Weverton of Palmeiras, guilty of the late comedy own goal that took Chelsea over the line in their 2-1 defeat of the Paulista club. Weverton should have dealt comfortably with Malo Gusto's deflected cross seven minutes from time, yet somehow contrived to make a complete

Collision... Jamal Musiala's horrific injury overshadowed PSG's clash with Bayern Munich

PSG's hard-earned 2-0 victory over Bayern Munich was overshadowed by an horrendous injury to Bayern star Jamal Musiala

mess of it, allowing the ball to bobble past him. Palmeiras' goal, splendidly arrowed home from an acute angle by boy wonder forward Estevao, offered the Chelsea community a glimpse into the future; next season, he will feature for the Blues.

After scaling the peaks in their last-16 triumph against Manchester City, Al Hilal were unable to replicate the magic in their 2-1 defeat to Fluminense. An evenly-matched encounter for the most part, Flu ultimately proved better at exploiting their periods of ascendancy, a ruthlessness exemplified by the outstanding finishing of goalscorers Matheus Martinelli and Hercules.

Kylian Mbappe, deployed as a substitute, netted with an acrobatic volley as Real Madrid beat Dortmund 3-2 in the last quarter-final. Bizarrely, much of the action was compressed into second-half stoppage time: two goals for Dortmund, Mbappe's high wire act and the sending off of Real Madrid centre-back Dean Huijsen.

SEMI-FINALS

PSG produced a peerless show of force in their 4-0 dismantling of Real Madrid at the MetLife Stadium, an unmistakeable sign that the world football balance of power has shifted to the Parc des Princes. Two-up after just nine minutes - thanks to goals from Fabian Ruiz and Ousmane Dembele - PSG's rare mix of intensity off the ball, slick interplay and pace constantly had the Real defence tottering, with centre-backs Raul Asencio and Antonio Rudiger charitably aiding the opposition with slapstick attempts at ball control. Much food for thought for new *Los Blancos* boss Xabi Alonso.

New Chelsea front-man Joao Pedro, acquired from Brighton in a £60 million deal just days earlier, marked his first start for his new club with two stunning strikes as the Blues sealed a final spot with a 2-0 win against Rio's Fluminense. Joao Pedro, who started his career at Flu, made a point of not celebrating either of his goals. The West Londoners never looked in real danger of losing, though Flu did have their moments, especially when midfielder Hercules went close in the first half, his goal-bound effort hooked off the line by the alert Marc Cucurella.

Respect... Chelsea star Joao Pedro chose not to celebrate against his former club Fluminense

FINAL

Bravery turned out to be Chelsea's trump card as they confounded the vast majority of the pre-match experts by dismantling hot favourites PSG 3-0 in a shockingly one-sided encounter in New Jersey. The Parisians, such a dominant winning machine this year, usually dictate terms from the off. Yet that was not the case in the final as Chelsea immediately put their opponents on the back foot with their feisty and intelligent high press. Clearly not intimidated by the reigning European champions, never showing the slightest hint of fear, the Blues successfully set the emotional and territorial tone, a rock-solid platform which they quickly translated into three first-half goals without reply. Chelsea's playmaking poster boy Cole Palmer, drifting in with stylish menace from his right-channel station, gave another totally inspiring performance, pulling two delicate finishes out of the hat to get the ball rolling and setting up a brilliant third for new boy striker Joao Pedro. PSG, outsmarted and befuddled, only rarely threatened and increasingly fell victim to red-mist petulance, midfielder Joao Neves red-carded late on for pulling the hair of Marc Cucurella.

Nick Bidwell

Poster boy ...Chelsea's Cole Palmer celebrates after scoring in the final v PSG

Favourites navigate first hurdle in group stage

Upset...Botafogo stunned European champions PSG

GROUP A

The golden oldies were out in force as Inter Miami booked their ticket for the last 16, Lionel Messi netting the winner in the 2-1 comeback victory over Porto and Luis Suarez on target in a 2-2 draw with Palmeiras. The Sao Paulo outfit then pipped the Florida club to first place in the group on goal difference. Inter Miami's unbeaten progress made them the only MLS side to make the knockout round. Porto and Al Ahly of Egypt, who featured in a pulsating 4-4 draw in New Jersey, were both eliminated at the first hurdle, unable to muster a win between them.

GROUP B

With Paris Saint-Germain, Botafogo and Atletico Madrid all accumulating six points, goal difference was required to decide the top two spots. The first heavyweight clash of the group, PSG's 4-0 thrashing of Atletico in Pasadena's Rose Bowl, would prove decisive in settling the final standings. In the clash of the European and South American champions, Botafogo edged out PSG 1-0, Igor Jesus on the scoresheet with a goal hewn from individual flair, determination and a deflection. Rock bottom and winless, Seattle Sounders fell silent.

GROUP C

Thanks to their 1-0 victory over Bayern Munich in sweltering temperatures in North Carolina on the final matchday, Benfica leapfrogged their opponents into top spot. The Lisbon club, for whom it was a first-ever competitive win against Bayern, went ahead early on through Norwegian attacking midfielder Andreas Schjelderup, then battened down the hatches to prevail. Bayern were not unduly concerned, having already qualified courtesy of victories over Auckland City (10-0) and Boca Juniors (2-1). Auckland, who conceded 17 goals in total having also lost 6-0 to Benfica, at least had the late consolation of a 1-1 draw with the consistently off-key Boca.

GROUP D

As was widely expected, Brazilian giants Flamengo and two-time European champions Chelsea never had to exert themselves to reach the last 16, far too strong for group also-rans Esperance from Tunisia and Los Angeles FC. Flamengo had the group under lock and key from the moment they beat Chelsea 3-1 in Philadelphia, a game in which the Londoners took an early lead through Pedro Neto, only for the tables to be comprehensively turned in a six-minute spell just after the hour-mark. First Bruno Henrique put Flamengo level and then Danilo put them in front, before Chelsea striker Nicolas Jackson was dismissed.

GROUP E

Internazionale needed a fillip after their heavy Champions League final defeat to PSG and looked on the mend in Pasadena and Seattle, not only dominating Group E comfortably, but also playing with plenty of panache under new coach Cristian Chivu. The *Nerazzurri*, particularly impressive in their 2-0 win over River Plate, seem

Disappointing... Boca Juniors could only draw with semi-professional Auckland City

Big-game knowhow...legendary Spanish defender Sergio Ramos was key as captain of Monterrey

to have unearthed a gem in young striker Francesco Pio Esposito. The Mexicans of Monterrey, led by veteran Spanish defender Sergio Ramos, claimed the other qualification spot, while the hugely disappointing River Plate, who had two players sent off against Inter, had to settle for a solitary win against Japanese outfit Urawa Red Diamonds.

GROUP F

Dortmund, so impressive in the latter stages of the Bundesliga campaign, deservedly went through as the best of this foursome. The Germans had their difficulties though, wasteful in their finishing in the 1-0 win against South Korea's Ulsan and outplayed for long periods by South African champions Mamelodi Sundowns; three goals up on the hour-mark, the *Schwarz-Gelben* had to hang on for their 4-3 victory. Group runners-up Fluminense went for the minimalist approach: a 4-2 win over the pointless Ulsan and two goalless draws with Dortmund and Sundowns.

GROUP G

Have Manchester City turned the corner after their first trophyless season in eight years? Maximum points, group supremacy and three thoroughly positive displays bodes well for next season. Their 5-2 hammering of Juventus in Orlando was the work of a team on a mission. The Old Lady, with Turkey attacker Kenan Yildiz standing out as both creator and goalscorer, claimed the other last-16 spot by ruthlessly seeing off the lightweights of Al Ain from UAE (5-0) and 22-time Moroccan champions Wydad (4-1). A mixed set of results for *Bianconeri* boss Igor Tudor to analyse.

GROUP H

Group winners Real Madrid palpably improved with each encounter in the opening phase and by the third and final matchday, a 3-0 triumph against Salzburg, the philosophy of new coach Xabi Alonso – a 3-5-2 set-up, control in possession, high intensity with and without the ball and all-conquering mentality – clearly were taking hold. New boys Trent Alexander-Arnold and Dean Huijsen, brought in to add quality to the wing-back and centre-back departments, already seem to be settling in. Undaunted and competitive from the word go, Saudi Arabian outfit Al Hilal moved onwards as runners-up, a point ahead of Salzburg, while Mexico's Pachuca finished bottom.

Nick Bidwell

Back to their best... Manchester City thrashed Juventus

FINAL STANDINGS

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	3	1	2	0	4	2	**5**
Inter Miami	3	1	2	0	4	3	**5**
Porto	3	0	2	1	5	6	**2**
Al Ahly	3	0	2	1	4	6	**2**

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG	3	2	0	1	6	1	**6**
Botafogo	3	2	0	1	3	2	**6**
Atletico Madrid	3	2	0	1	4	5	**6**
Seattle Sounders	3	0	0	3	2	7	**0**

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	3	2	1	0	9	2	**7**
Bayern Munich	3	2	0	1	12	2	**6**
Boca Juniors	3	0	2	1	4	5	**2**
Auckland City	3	0	1	2	1	17	**1**

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo	3	2	1	0	6	2	**7**
Chelsea	3	2	0	1	6	3	**6**
Esperance	3	1	0	2	1	5	**3**
LAFC	3	0	1	2	1	4	**1**

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Internazionale	3	2	1	0	5	2	**7**
Monterrey	3	1	2	0	5	1	**5**
River Plate	3	1	1	1	3	3	**4**
Urawa Reds	3	0	0	3	2	9	**0**

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borussia Dortmund	3	2	1	0	5	3	**7**
Fluminense	3	1	2	0	4	2	**5**
Mamelodi Sundowns	3	1	1	1	4	4	**4**
Ulsan HD	3	0	0	3	2	6	**0**

GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester City	3	3	0	0	13	2	**9**
Juventus	3	2	0	1	11	6	**6**
Al Ain	3	1	0	2	2	12	**3**
Wydad	3	0	0	3	2	8	**0**

GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	3	2	1	0	7	2	**7**
Al Hilal	3	1	2	0	3	1	**5**
Salzburg	3	1	1	1	2	4	**4**
Pachuca	3	0	0	3	2	7	**0**

Mexico's CONCACAF dominance continues

Gold Cup review by James Nalton

THE FINAL

UNITED STATES 1
(Richards 4)
MEXICO 2
(Jimenez 27, Ed. Alvarez 77)

With a World Cup looming and international football preparing to descend on North American shores in 2026, it was Mexico who claimed CONCACAF's last regional prize before then, extending their record as the Gold Cup's most successful team and confirming themselves as the strongest of the three co-hosts.

It was a milestone tenth tournament win for Mexico and came at a time when all three 2026 hosts are experiencing some degree of apprehension to go with the excitement and anticipation of a World Cup on home soil. Are Mexico, Canada and the United States ready to welcome the world? And will their teams put up a respectable showing on the pitch when it matters most?

A 2025 summer of football in the United States gave some clues as to the answers, but it was Mexico who emerged from this Gold Cup with the most convincing response.

The added intrigue provided by the impending World Cup was not limited to those hosting it. CONCACAF's other nations were using the Gold Cup not only as tournament experience but also as preparation for their World Cup qualifying campaigns, which enter the crucial third-round stage later this year.

Those who underperformed in the Gold Cup, such as Jamaica and Panama, will claim lessons learned, while the teams that progressed and impressed, such as Guatemala and Honduras, will be looking to carry this momentum into September's matches, where there are three World Cup spots up for grabs along with two inter-confederation play-off places.

Because Canada, Mexico and the United States qualify for the 2026 World Cup as hosts, these Gold Cup games were their final competitive fixtures before the big 48-team tournament kicks off next June. Only one of the three will be pleased with the outcome.

Even the biggest critics of a Mexico team that has slowly slipped down FIFA's rankings since 2021 will take positives from their recent regional displays. While some nagging doubts remain, they keep winning the regional trophies regardless and eventually had too much for the United States in the final after conceding an early set-piece goal.

Raul Jimenez got them back on track with an emphatic finish at the near post before Player of the Tournament Edson Alvarez found himself free in the area, and just about onside, to head home the winner.

While some nagging doubts remain, Mexico keep winning the regional trophies

Mexico have now won three of the last four regional titles, with a Nations League win sandwiched between two Gold Cup victories.

Good teams can grow out of difficult moments, as they encourage a reset of sorts from which a refreshing new outlook and potential new star players can emerge. This is what Mexico will hope is happening now, and they'll hope they've timed a resurgence right for the World Cup.

The most obvious example of an emerging player for Mexico at this Gold Cup was 16-year-old Gilberto Mora. The Tijuana midfielder became Mexico's youngest-ever player when he came into the team for Luis Chavez, who suffered an ACL injury in training ahead of the knockout rounds.

Equaliser...Raul Jimenez scores in the Gold Cup final

Gold Cup champions ...Mexico players celebrate with the continental crown

Mora started every game from the quarter-finals onwards and subsequently became the youngest player to win the Gold Cup. He assisted the only goal in the semi-final against Honduras and finished the final with an assured pass success of 94 per cent.

Mexico won all but one of their games at this tournament, with the only aberration being a 0-0 draw with Costa Rica, and they should have won that too. They kept clean sheets in four of their six games and, after a hectic 3-2 opener against the Dominican Republic, settled into the tournament and became a solid outfit that found ways to win.

When it came to the final, they outplayed the United States. Even though Mauricio Pochettino's team contained numerous fringe players, many of whom will be merely competing for a place in the larger squad at the World Cup, their showing when a big game arrived still fell below expectations.

Christian Pulisic, Antonee Robinson, Timothy Weah, Weston McKennie and Folarin Balogun are all likely starters in Pochettino's best XI, and all were missing for this last chance at competitive action.

Having only had a couple of games at a time with any group of players during previous international breaks, Pochettino tried to get the most from an extended period with this particular group, regardless of personnel. He used the six Gold Cup games to get a good look at some of those fringe players and test out a system that might also suit those who were absent.

Some players, including Diego Luna, Malik Tillman and goalkeeper Matt Freese, auditioned well and should at least be in the squad for 2026, while Chris Richards and Tim Ream have a shot at being the first-choice defensive pairing.

Unless he performs a miracle and wins the World Cup, this might also have been Pochettino's only chance to win a trophy with the US, as many expect him to leave the role when his contract ends after the World Cup.

Though the path of a USMNT manager is invariably rocky, other recent head coaches managed to lift silverware amid the chaos. Gregg Berhalter won the Gold Cup in 2021 and CONCACAF Nations Leagues in 2021 and 2024, while interim manager B.J. Callaghan won the Nations League in 2023.

The squad that won the Gold Cup for Berhalter back in 2021 was not massively dissimilar in its make-up to the one at Pochettino's disposal. Only four players in the 2021 squad were not based in the US or MLS, compared to ten this time around.

CONCACAF Gold Cup final disappointment...the United States' Argentine head coach Mauricio Pochettino

Breakout stars... Mexico's Gilberto Mora holds off US midfielder Malik Tillman

No matter the make-up of the squad, the United States always expect to win Gold Cups, so there will still be huge disappointment for fans that their team could not at least assert some regional dominance in the 2025 tournaments.

It was a similar story for Canada who, missing a few key players of their own, expected to go far in this tournament but ultimately underwhelmed in their penalty-shootout exit in the quarter-finals. They failed to live up to pre-tournament hopes and now have 11 months to rebuild some confidence and momentum.

Although this was a home tournament for the United States, the packed crowds that attended their semi-final against Guatemala in St Louis and the final against Mexico in Houston were largely made up of opposition supporters.

That the latter stages drew such crowds

> Mexico have now won three of the last four regional titles, with a Nations League win sandwiched between two Gold Cup victories

TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT

GOALKEEPER

Matt FREESE
(United States)
Penalty-shootout heroics against Costa Rica in the quarter-final boosted the New York City FC shot-stopper's stock no end, to the point where the 26-year-old is now being tipped to start at the World Cup ahead of previous incumbent Matt Turner. One mistake against Haiti was an anomaly, as he built a solid platform for future US appearances.

DEFENDERS

Michael Amir MURILLO
(Panama)
The Marseille man, formerly of New York Red Bulls and Anderlecht, was one of Panama's best attacking outlets, finishing the tournament with the fourth-most chances created (ten). He racked up these numbers despite being rested for the game against Jamaica and his team going out earlier than expected. Bagged two assists in three games.

Chris RICHARDS
(United States)
The Crystal Palace defender confirmed he is the United States' best centre-back. The 25-year-old scored twice in the tournament, including the opening goal of the final to go with the only goal in a win against Saudi Arabia, both from Sebastian Berhalter set-piece crosses. A guaranteed 2026 starter.

Cesar MONTES
(Mexico)
Formed an excellent central defensive partnership with Johan Vasquez, which played a big part in four clean sheets for the eventual champions. Scored both goals in a 2-0 win over Suriname, and was credited with a goal against the Dominican Republic that deflected in off him, meaning he scored three of Mexico's five goals in the group stage.

Joseph ROSALES
(Honduras)
The 24-year-old Minnesota United full-back epitomised Honduras' unlikely progress in the tournament, recovering from the poor display in the 6-0 loss to Canada and going on to become one of the best players in the tournament down the left flank. Scored a penalty in the quarter-final shootout defeat of Panama for good measure.

Player of the Tournament...Mexico captain Edson Alvarez

MIDFIELDERS

Edson ALVAREZ
(Mexico)
Goals in the first game and the last game bookended an excellent finals for the West Ham midfielder, who was officially named the tournament's best player after the final. More pertinently, he also won the tournament's "Mark of a Fighter" award for the more combative side of his game.

Gilberto MORA
(Mexico)
The 16-year-old midfielder was the revelation of the tournament, and a player who looks like he could be a key part of the Mexico national team for many years. He's had an early start, becoming their youngest-ever player, and never looked out of place, including in an assured final performance.

Malik TILLMAN
(United States)
Playing in a role close to the striker, Tillman was the standout player for the US up until the final. His performances produced three goals and two assists, which had many tipping him for a place in the starting XI at next year's World Cup.

Alexis VEGA
(Mexico)
Took his impressive club form for Toluca to the national team set-up and was one of the most consistent players throughout. Although he only registered one goal and one assist, his direct running and creativity constantly worried the opposition as he created 12 chances for his team-mates.

STRIKERS

Ismael DIAZ
(Panama)
The tournament's top scorer with six goals – more than double his nearest rival. A hat-trick against Jamaica was the standout, and he was part of a Panama attack that produced plenty of chances. Unfortunately, his side couldn't take those chances as they lost in the quarter-final.

Raul JIMENEZ
(Mexico)
Scored goals when it mattered in the semi-finals and the final, building on his excellent 2025 Nations League finals performance. He's back in top form and, although he'll be 35 by the time of the World Cup, he still looks like the best option to lead the line for Mexico.

and attention at all, along with plenty of TV viewers, was encouraging. This Gold Cup was played in a summer packed with football on US shores as the Club World Cup took place simultaneously, MLS and USL domestic leagues continued, and the women's national team played several home friendlies.

The Gold Cup final was attended by 70,925 spectators, while 1.9 million watched the US defeat Costa Rica on penalties in the quarters.

Mexico games continue to attract TV viewers in the millions in the US. Next summer, *El Tri* will play all three of their group games at home, and potentially the last-32 and last-16 ties as well, but even if they do have to cross the border they'll still attract large and partisan crowds.

Mexico and many of their fans will be encouraged by consecutive CONCACAF victories a year out from the World Cup, and their team have a positive togetherness under Javier Aguirre.

It's thought the 66-year-old will hand over the reins to his assistant Rafael Marquez after next year's tournament, so the players will also be playing for their manager. It's the next thing they have to go for competitively, and it's the big one. Thanks to this tenth Gold Cup, they go in good shape – or at least as good as they could hope for.

TEAM BY TEAM

CANADA

Even though they were missing several usual starters through injury, including CONCACAF standouts Alphonso Davies and Moise Bombito, the quarter-final defeat to Guatemala was still a shock result for Jesse Marsch's team. The first-half red card for Jacob Shaffelburg made their task unnecessarily difficult before they exited on penalties.

COSTA RICA

Miguel Herrera's team were looking to join fellow Central American sides Guatemala and Honduras in causing an upset, but didn't quite show enough against the United States despite taking the game to penalties. Manfred Ugalde, who scored three in the group stage, was suspended for the quarter-final showdown and was a big miss.

CURACAO

Led by veteran Dutch coach Dick Advocaat, the team from the tiny island had the potential to overcome their low ranking and advance from the group. Draws with El Salvador and Canada set them up for the final game but, when it mattered, the three points they needed against Honduras eluded them.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The debutants and lowest-ranked team in the tournament gave a good account of themselves in tough games against Mexico and Costa Rica. They played football that belied their ranking, but couldn't upset the heavyweights. They can take plenty from this tournament, though, not least Peter Gonzalez's outstanding goal against Mexico.

EL SALVADOR

The Central Americans didn't muster a single goal – the only team to fail to find the net. A 0-0 draw with Curacao kicked off a fairly uninspiring group stage, which suggested they'll also struggle in World Cup qualifying.

GUADELOUPE

The French overseas region are among CONCACAF's entertainers with Thierry Ambrose and Ange-Freddy Plumain driving an attack that can score against anyone. The problem is, they conceded ten goals, the most of any team in the group stage.

GUATEMALA

It was an enterprising tournament performance from Guatemala who, perhaps surprisingly, edged Panama as the most impressive Central American side. Some productive periods of possession and pressing took them to the final four, but despite a decent showing they couldn't quite recover after conceding two early goals against the US in the semis.

HAITI

Haiti needed to register points in games versus guests Saudi Arabia and Group D's lowest-ranked side, Trinidad & Tobago. They lost the first and drew the second, despite being the better team even when down to ten men. They only narrowly lost to the US, but those early results sent them out.

Penalty-shootout hero...Guatemala keeper Kenderson Navarro celebrates

Suspended... Costa Rica missed Manfred Ugalde in their quarter-final defeat to the US

Dramatic...Curacao players celebrate their last-gasp equaliser v Canada

Goalless...El Salvador crashed out

Semi-finals... Honduras were tripped up by Mexico

Top goalscorer ...Ismael Diaz scores a penalty for Panama

Costly...Jacob Shaffelburg is sent off for Canada in the quarter-final against Guatemala

Guests...Asian nation Saudi Arabia lost 2-0 to Mexico in the quarter-finals

HONDURAS

A 6-0 loss to Canada in their opening game suggested an early exit was on the cards, but the Central Americans went on to win both remaining group games before upsetting Panama on penalties in the quarter-finals. They progressed well, if not always convincingly, before drawing a blank against Mexico.

JAMAICA

A 1-0 defeat to Guatemala in their opener left Steve McClaren's Reggae Boyz with an uphill task to progress from Group C. They were far from convincing against Guadeloupe and lucky to walk away with a win. A 4-1 loss to Panama confirmed they aren't yet ready to mix it with CONCACAF's best.

MEXICO

El Tri defended their title, adding another CONCACAF trophy to the cabinet to go with a Nations League win earlier in the year. They brushed aside the United States in the final despite conceding early on, and at this moment will be the happiest of the three 2026 World Cup co-hosts.

PANAMA

Runners-up in the 2023 Gold Cup and 2025 Nations League, Panama are now expected to go far in CONCACAF tournaments and maybe win one soon, so the quarter-final exit to Honduras on penalties came as a shock. Despite the early exit, striker Ismael Diaz was the tournament's top scorer. The next expectation is World Cup qualification.

SAUDI ARABIA

The Green Falcons performed pretty much as expected and, it could be said, as desired for a guest team. Just about good enough to get out of their group, but not quite good enough once they met one of the region's top teams in the knockout rounds. The Saudis only mustered one shot in their 2-0 defeat to Mexico in the quarter-final.

SURINAME

The South American nation's opener v Costa Rica was one of the tournament's early highlights. They staged a dramatic comeback from 2-0 down to lead 3-2 before losing to a Manfred Ugalde penalty in the 13th minute of added time. Gyrano Kerk and Richonell Margaret combined well to no avail.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

After kicking things off with a heavy 5-0 defeat to the US, Dwight Yorke's side recovered to gain draws against Haiti and Saudi Arabia. It was still a disappointing display overall, but Yorke said it was a useful one as they'll learn from it ahead of the World Cup qualifiers.

UNITED STATES

Mauricio Pochettino's side were missing a host of key players, but still produced encouraging moments and settled into a shape that might be used for the World Cup. However, regardless of perceived squad strength, the US always expect to win the Gold Cup and fell short, leaving them still seeking a meaningful victory under the Argentine coach.

Slovakia

LUKAS VRABLIK

Two in a row for England Under-21s

Lee Carsley leads his Young Lions side to European Under-21 Championship glory in Bratislava two years after success in Georgia

The final of the 2025 European Under-21 Championship brought a lot of exciting moments and tension, with plenty of talented players on display for both sides. But it was a goal in the second minute of extra-time by Jonathan Rowe, the Marseille forward, that ultimately handed England a 3-2 victory and the trophy.

Germany desperately chased the third goal, but the closest they came was Merlin Rohl's shot rattling the crossbar with just seconds remaining. Then, it was time to celebrate for England as they lifted the trophy again – just as they had done in Batumi, Georgia in 2023.

"I suppose the challenge now is to do it again in two years," said head coach Lee Carsley, who recently signed a new contract keeping him in post until 2027, after the game. "Funnily enough, on Saturday I got the new squad of players that are potentially available for the next campaign so I'm not thinking about moving on too quickly."

Popular among his players, Carsley

Runners-up... Germany celebrate during the group-stage win over England

Player of the Tournament... Harvey Elliott celebrates his goal in the final

has cultivated a winning mentality among his squad, as match-winner Rowe confirmed: "The belief factor was the main thing," he said.

That mentality was called upon when Germany recovered from going 2-0 down in the first half to level the scores in the second half. But Carsley remained calm and encouraged his players to rise to the occasion in extra-time.

"I felt that we were on top in extra-time and I felt you just want to give them that belief to go and attack them. Try to score, don't try to hold on. Go for it and if you get caught and lose the game, that's fine.

"The most important thing is that the Under-21s keep winning and keep producing players for the senior team, along with the Under-17s and Under-19s," Carsley added.

Harvey Elliott, the Player of the Tournament and scorer of the final's opening goal, was certainly one such player to put himself forward for senior selection. His talent and versatility shone throughout the tournament, while James McAtee beside him and Elliot Anderson behind him contributed to an impressive midfield unit. At the back, central defensive partners Charlie Cresswell and Jarell Quansah provided a solid backbone, giving senior coach Thomas Tuchel food for thought.

Germany can consider themselves unfortunate. Unlike England, they were consistent throughout the tournament, even beating the Young Lions in the group stage.

"When you look at the players' faces, there is disappointment, definitely," said the runners-up's head coach Antonio Di Salvo. "I'm sitting here as a very proud coach of a team which has been playing great football for two years and have been improving."

Di Salvo previously worked as an assistant to Stefan Kuntz in the Under-21s, but was unable to repeat their triumphs of 2017 and 2021. Still, there is potential in this Germany side. Nick Woltemade was the tournament's top scorer with six goals and has been linked with a move from Stuttgart to Bayern Munich, captain Eric Martel was important in the midfield, while other key men like Mainz's Paul Nebel and Nelson Weiper have already been collecting appearances in the Bundesliga. Braga centre-back Bright Arrey-Mbi was also among the tournament's revelations.

> "I suppose the challenge now is to do it again in two years"
> England Under-21s head coach Lee Carsley

In the semi-finals, Germany overcame a strong French side that impressed in Slovakia. Led by the likes of Mathys Tel, Quentin Merlin and Lucien Agoume, France had big ambitions but ultimately came up short against Woltemade and co. with a heavy 3-0 loss in Kosice.

Netherlands, under the coaching of former *Oranje* international right-back Michael Reiziger, produced something of a surprise in the quarter-finals by beating Portugal 1-0. The Dutch had been reduced to ten men after a red card for Ruben van Bommel (son of another former Dutch international, Mark) in the 21st minute, but clung on before Ernest Poku grabbed a late winner. It was a triumph for the defence, particularly left-back Ian Maatsen and centre-back Jorrel Hato, but they could not keep out England in the semis. Elliott struck twice, including one in the 86th minute, to send his team into the final.

There was severe disappointment in Spain, who travelled with a strong and technically able side but lost 2-1 to England in the quarter-finals. Italy's campaign also came to an end at the same stage, losing 3-2 to Germany after extra-time.

The knockout stages, then, were dominated almost entirely by traditional European football powers, but they did face some scares along the way. Spain needed last-gasp goals to beat both Romania and Slovakia in Group A, while France turned losses into victories late on against Georgia in the group stage and then again against Denmark in the quarter-finals. Even the eventual winners England had their issues, scraping through the group with four points after drawing 0-0 with Slovenia.

As for the hosts, finishing third in their group behind Spain and Italy was disappointing but not unexpected, and they captured the local attention, attracting the biggest crowds of the tournament. In their final game, the supporters were rewarded with a 2-1 win over Romania.

Champions...Carsley hugs Tino Livramento, one of six England players in the Team of the Tournament

Colombia

CARL WORSWICK

Rodallega of the Rovers

Ex-Premier League striker Hugo Rodallega's heroics fire Santa Fe to the Apertura title

Golden Boot...Hugo Rodallega receives the league's top scorer prize after notching 16 goals

Colombian champions... Santa Fe players celebrate with the trophy

First the grimace, then a flood of tears. At nearly 40 years of age, Hugo Rodallega's body had already groaned, his joints were already creaking when a shot of pain seized his groin. With 12 minutes left on the clock in the Colombian Apertura championship decider, and the tie against Deportivo Independiente Medellin hanging in the balance at 1-1, Santa Fe's captain bowed his head and sobbed into his shirt. Rodallega's night appeared over, his career about to end on a whimper.

But one final ball, a goal-kick flicked into his path and the former Premier League man was jolted back into life. Laying the ball off, he hobbled into the penalty area before pouncing on the rebound with one last swing of the leg. "GOOOOOOAL! The champion of resilience! The most respected player out there! Hugo Rodallega!" squealed the overwrought commentator as the veteran striker flopped down, broken, to the ground.

Having drawn the first leg of the final 0-0 at home, Santa Fe had fallen behind to title favourites Medellin in the return game through Francisco Fydriszewski's early strike. But after Santiago Mosquera's looping header had levelled matters 13 minutes later, Rodallega's final contribution of the game proved crucial in landing *Los Leones* their tenth league title. The indomitable captain had struck again; goal number 16 of the season.

"In the warm-up I felt something go in my muscle, but I had to play," the league's top goalscorer admitted later, his words again crumbling into tears. "I always said I'd retire if we became champions, but my family and team-mates now insist I continue."

Eclipsed by their more illustrious Bogota neighbours Millonarios for most of their 85-year history, Santa Fe had long forged a reputation for dogged resistance and collective sacrifice. Born in a Bogota coffee shop in 1941 by founder Luis Robeldo upon his return to Colombia after studying in England at a boarding school near Bath, the club adopted the colours of Arsenal, the team Robledo had supported during his time in England.

Unable to compete with the riches of Millonarios, Santa Fe nevertheless won the very first Colombian league in 1948 with a team made up largely of local players. Success against the odds was an identity that would carry the team throughout the years.

> "In the warm-up I felt something go in my muscle, but I had to play"
>
> Sante Fe captain Hugo Rodallega

In recent times, however, Santa Fe had struggled. Financial worries and a constant merry-go-round of coaches had plunged the team into an endless cycle of confused transition and upheaval.

And so this season began. Having qualified for the Copa Libertadores preliminary stage, Santa Fe were

dumped out of the competition in February by Chilean minnows Deportes Iquique on penalties. Rodallega saw his decisive spot-kick saved. Elimination cost Uruguayan coach Pablo Peirano his job. In came interim manager Francisco Lopez for seven games, before Uruguayan manager Jorge Bava became coach number three. It was still March.

After a 6-1 thrashing by tiny Alianza Valledupar in the final game of the regular season, Santa Fe were drawn in the semi-final group stage alongside Medellin giants Atletico Nacional, Once Caldas and eternal rivals Millonarios. Not even their supporters gave them any hope.

Santa Fe won just one of their three home games, but victory in Manizales against Once Caldas and a win away against Nacional courtesy of a goal from his own half by Yilmar Velasquez set up a winner-took-all showdown with Millonarios.

Two knockout punches gave Santa Fe a 2-0 lead after just nine minutes, yet both goals had generated controversy. Was there an offside in Rodallega's opener? Did Ewil Murillo foul Stiven Vega in the build-up to the second? Then came the easy part: sit back, suffer, sweat it out. Frustrated and uninspired, Millonarios failed to take a grip of the game and Santa Fe famously held out.

Third coach of the campaign...Santa Fe's Jorge Bava

SEASON'S BEST

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Hugo RODALLEGA *(Santa Fe)*
Courage, resilience and leadership. Santa Fe's captain fired in 16 goals in 26 league games, including the dramatic injury-laden strike that won his team the Apertura title in the most *Roy of the Rovers* fashion. Roy Race step aside.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Nicolas AREVALO *(Millonarios)*
Sent off in his first start of the season in March, the dynamic 22-year-old midfielder nevertheless bounced back to become the league's breakthrough star and Millonarios' best player as the Bogota club missed out on the Apertura final by a whisker.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Jorge BAVA *(Santa Fe)*
Santa Fe's third manager of the year, Bava had his work cut out trying to convince the club's fans he was the man for the job. But the Uruguayan ex-goalie got the results when it mattered and in just 16 games guided Santa Fe to their first title in nine years.

"Their first goal was dodgy but it's happened all season," fumed striker Radamel Falcao, playing his last game for Millonarios. "Even if they ban me for 50,000 matches and I can't play in Colombia again, let me just say that decisions always went against us."

But as one of Colombia's seasoned masters lost his head, another kept his cool. Channelling inspiration from plucky Santa Fe's underdog status, Rodallega summoned strength from club folklore.

"Few people believed in us but here we are in the final," Rodallega observed. "They looked down on us, they wrote us off, but we stayed united."

In the other semi-final group, undefeated Medellin had waltzed to top spot. In the final's goalless first leg, it was they who had wasted the best two chances. Now, at their Medellin home, the title was theirs to lose.

Yet Medellin failed to make their early lead count. Worse still, nobody bothered to pick up the lumbering ex-Wigan and Fulham man, eyes still damp with tears and battered body being dragged into the box for one last push.

Whether Rodallega opts to now extend his career remains to be seen. But his name is already etched in the history books as one of Santa Fe's all-time greats.

South America

TIM VICKERY

Can the Club World Cup impact the Libertadores?

The hangover from the US-hosted competition could add a layer of unpredictability to the Copa Libertadores knockout stages

All-Brazilian clash...Flamengo face Internacional in the last 16

The last 16 of the Copa Libertadores contains plenty of recent champions – five of the clubs have won eight of the last ten titles between them, and there are also the last two winners of the Copa Sudamericana – so the knockout round is a round-up of the usual suspects.

But there is one new and unusual factor thrown in: how will four of the leading contenders cope with the fallout from the Club World Cup? While most of the others have been relaxing, Botafogo, Flamengo, Palmeiras and River Plate have been on the other side of the Rio Grande playing a high-profile Club World Cup in intense summer heat. Might they pay a price for their exertions?

If so, it could tip the balance in the only all-Brazilian meeting of the round. Flamengo will go into their meeting with Internacional as favourites. Before the break for the Club World Cup, Flamengo topped the domestic league, while Internacional got off to a poor start, languishing in the relegation zone. But Inter are dangerous opponents, and should be the far fresher side.

That same half of the draw contains the only Brazil v Argentina clash in this round – surprising given that Brazil supply six of the last 16 and Argentina four. Despite indifferent form (also in the drop zone domestically before the Club World Cup break), Fortaleza will start as favourites against a Velez Sarsfield side

who, faithful to the logic of Argentine football, are selling key players in the mid-year window. But this could be building towards a Brazil v Argentina semi-final. Whoever emerges from the Flamengo-Inter clash will expect to get past the winner of Paraguay's Cerro Porteno and Estudiantes of Argentina. And Racing are favourites to get past Penarol of Uruguay and the winner of the Fortaleza-Velez tie. Racing beat Botafogo home and away at the start of the year to win the Recopa, and enjoyed similar domination over Fortaleza in the group phase. They have only won the Libertadores on one occasion – way back in 1967 – but are aiming high this year.

The other half of the draw could also be building towards a high-octane Brazil v Argentina clash at the quarter-final stage. Despite scoring just four goals in six games, Universitario became the first Peruvian team to get out of the group phase since 2013. Their reward was to be drawn against Sao Paulo giants Palmeiras, the only side to complete the group programme with a 100 per cent record. The winners there will meet either Libertad of Paraguay – gutsy but limited – or River Plate of Argentina, the last non-Brazilian team to win the Copa Libertadores and consistently the biggest challenge to one-nation domination. River have been forced to sell young attacking midfielder Franco Mastantuono a few months earlier than they would have liked, but coach Marcelo Gallardo retains a squad full of attacking options.

The other two second-round ties will inevitably produce a semi-finalist either from Brazil or from the north of the continent. Sao Paulo, who have just replaced one Argentine coach with another, Hernan Crespo coming in for Luis Zubeldia, are up against Atletico Nacional of Colombia, champions in 2016 who have done very little since. The Colombians played a strong group stage, winning all their home matches, but can they keep hold of star man Marino Hinestroza, whose incisive attacks from the right flank were one of the highlights of the group phase?

Holders...Botafogo will face Ecuador's LDU Quito in the round of 16

While most of the others have been relaxing, four of the leading contenders have been playing a high-profile Club World Cup in intense summer heat

Colombian clubs have underperformed in recent years because it seems that their main aim is to sell their talent. Plenty of clubs, not least in Brazil, have been showing an interest in Hinestroza, but it would surely benefit the competition if Atletico Nacional were to show the ambition to keep hold of him for a few more months.

And defending champions Botafogo will renew an intense recent rivalry against Ecuador's LDU, or Liga of Quito. Player sales – and others coming in – make this a very different Botafogo side from the one that won the title last November. Liga's task will surely be to attempt to run down the clock and keep the score down in Rio and then go all out at the altitude of Quito. On the evidence of the group phase, the acquisition of some attacking pace could make a difference as they go in search of ending Botafogo's short reign.

Seven countries still have an interest in the 2025 Copa Libertadores. Come August 21, that could be whittled down to just Brazil and Argentina – or maybe not, if opponents can take advantage of some post-Club World Cup tiredness.

Atletico Nacional star...Marino Hinestroza

KNOCKOUT ROUND DRAW

- Atletico Nacional v Sao Paulo
- Botafogo v LDU Quito
- Universitario v Palmeiras
- Libertad v River Plate
- Fortaleza v Velez Sarsfield
- Penarol v Racing
- Flamengo v Internacional
- Cerro Porteno v Estudiantes

South America

TIM VICKERY

Star forwards... Mushuc Runa duo Carlos Orejuela and Cristian Penilla

Update

Minnows Mushuc Runa reaching new heights

The indigenous club from the Ecuadorian mountains have been the standout story of the Copa Sudamericana so far

Both Caracas and Academia Puerto Cabello had their moments but neither managed to make the cut in the Copa Sudamericana, so continental club football for the Venezuelans was all over by the end of May. The other nine countries all have at least one dog left in the race – but only four of those nations have a guaranteed presence when the Sudamericana last 16 is played in mid-August.

That is because in this competition only the eight group winners go straight through to the next phase. The runners-up play off in July against teams dropping out of the Libertadores – the eight who finished third in their groups. All of this adds spice to the first few months of the Sudamericana, because there is a strong incentive to top the group.

This year, the opening few months were a triumph for Argentina. Huracan, Independiente, Lanus and Godoy Cruz all came out on top, taking up half of the automatic slots. Cienciano of Peru were surprise group winners, pushing Atletico Mineiro into second place – summing up a poor performance by the Brazilians. Fluminense were the only group winners, with three teams (Gremio and Vasco da Gama alongside Atletico Mineiro) finishing second, and Corinthians and Cruzeiro astonishingly missing the cut altogether along with Vitoria.

Perhaps the biggest triumph was that of the two teams from Ecuador. Universidad Catolica of Quito sailed through, with the joint second-best record overall, building on the strong campaign of last year. And the team with the best statistical record – five wins and one draw – was Mushuc Runa. It is fair to say that no one saw this coming.

Mushuc Runa was set up in the late 1970s as a savings and credit co-operative for the indigenous communities around the city of Ambato, just over 70 miles south of Quito. The name translates as "new man" in the Quechua language. Ambato already has two football teams, Macara and Tecnico Universitario, so many might have doubted the wisdom of Mushuc Runa starting their own club in 2003. But the initiative has proved a success, with the club getting into Ecuador's

Red ponchos... Mushuc Runa's fans wearing the club's symbolic outfits

second division in 2012 and making it into the top flight two years later. They were relegated in 2016, but have been back in the first division since 2019 – although they might be looking over their shoulder this year. With the club focusing on its Sudamericana campaign, domestic form has suffered.

The euphoria is not hard to understand. Mushuc Runa participated twice before in the Sudamericana, in 2019 and 2022. But on both occasions, the club was quickly eliminated in the preliminary round without winning a game. This time their splendid form – winning famously away to Cruzeiro – has carried the name of the club and its indigenous roots across the continent and beyond.

Mushuc Runa's symbol is a red poncho – the traditional outer garment of the highland people of the region. On the field, though, Mushuc Runa have now outgrown the early idea of providing opportunities just for players from the nearby community. One of the few home-produced players to have featured, young striker Elian Caicedo, who weighed in with two goals in the group phase, is not a local lad. The squad has an international flavour. The coach is a Copa Libertadores legend, the Uruguayan-born former Paraguay goalkeeper Ever Hugo Almeida. And the squad contains a few Uruguayans, a couple of Bolivia internationals – including current national team captain Luis Haquin – and Stiven Tapiero, a Colombian who plays a vital role keeping things ticking over in midfield. Perhaps the most important players have been two highly-experienced wide strikers – the one-time Ecuador international Cristian Penilla (who won two caps back in 2014) cutting in from the left wing, and the busy Carlos Orejuela, in his second spell with the club, whose gift of attacking space in the penalty area brought him four goals.

> The team with the best statistical record – five wins and one draw – was Mushuc Runa. It is fair to say that no one saw this coming

This year began on a note of tragedy for the club. During pre-season training, Uruguayan striker Mathias Acuna was found dead in an Ambato hotel room. His team-mates have rallied to honour his memory, and he is part of the story of their Sudamericana run. His goals in the second half of last season helped the club qualify for the international competition.

Two key questions now surround the second half of Mushuc Runa's year. Can they preserve their first division status? And how far can they go in the Sudamericana? In the group phase they won all three away games, against Cruzeiro, Union Santa Fe of Argentina and Palestino of Chile, so they are clearly more than altitude specialists. Mushuc Runa need fear no one as they strive to keep hitting the heights.

KNOCKOUT ROUND DRAW

- Alianza Lima / Gremio v Universidad Catolica
- Universidad de Chile / Guarani v Independiente
- Bahia / America de Cali v Fluminense
- Central Cordoba / Cerro Largo v Lanus
- Bolivar / Palestino v Cienciano
- Atletico Bucaramanga / Atletico Mineiro v Godoy Cruz
- San Antonio Bulo Bulo / Once Caldas v Huracan
- Independiente del Valle / Vasco da Gama v Mushuc Runa

Cruzeiro shock... Orejuela celebrates scoring in the win over the Brazilians

Top scorer ...Universidad Catolica's Ismael Diaz hit six goals in the group stage

Zimbabwe

STEVE MENARY

Zimbabwe target UK for new recruits

African nation is looking to the diaspora in England and Scotland to help boost squad ahead of AFCON

Successful switch... Wolves youngster Ethan Sutherland

The Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) is stepping up its campaign to recruit from the UK with attempts to identify eligible junior players.

The country was a British colony before securing independence in 1980. Under long-time ruler Robert Mugabe, living standards slowly dropped and many Zimbabweans moved to the UK. There are now an estimated 130,000 Zimbabweans living in the UK.

Zimbabwe already have a number of senior players based in the UK including goalkeeper Marley Tavaziva at Brentford, ex-England youth international defender Brendan Galloway at Plymouth Argyle, midfielders Marvelous Nakamba and Marshall Munetsi at Luton Town and Wolverhampton Wanderers respectively and striker Tawanda Maswanhise with Motherwell in the Scottish Premiership.

ZIFA has been quick to sign up eligible younger players, such as 20-year-old defender Joey Phuthi, who was recently on the books of Sheffield Wednesday. Like Munetsi, Maswanhise and Galloway, Phuti was born in Zimbabwe but moved to the UK later, in his case aged 12. Though finding senior game time has been difficult, Phuthi made his senior international debut for Zimbabwe in March 2024 against Kenya.

ZIFA subsequently began to identify eligible players born in the UK to Zimbabwean parents, such as Tawanda Chirewa. The 21-year-old, who is also at Wolves but was loaned out to Derby County and Huddersfield Town last season, won the first of six caps in 2024.

> "Zimbabwe is for every Zimbabwean living anywhere"
> Zimbabwe FA president Nqobile Magwizi

Three players from the Zimbabwean diaspora in England were called up to the Under-20 squad last autumn. Defender Kurainashe Musanhi spent the 2024-25 season on loan at eighth-tier Hertford Town from Crystal Palace, Kennedy Mupomba plays for Chelmsford in the sixth tier National League South, while striker Tanaka Cherera plays for reformed former Football League club Bury FC, who were promoted from the North West Counties League last term.

ZIFA's next step came through its Roots & Dreams initiative led by global and diaspora chair Marshall Gore, who wants to recruit eligible players born in 2011 and before.

Wolves' Ethan Sutherland was the first to make the switch in mid-April, having spent the 2024-25 season on loan at Solihull Moors. He grew up in Scotland, where he played for St Mirren and Alloa Athletic and the country's Under-19 side, before joining Wolves in 2024 and switching nationality.

Much of the Zimbabwean diaspora is concentrated in London and the Home Counties in places such as Luton, Milton Keynes and Slough, and the timing of Sutherland's switch was a boost for ZIFA.

Meet-and-greet sessions for potential new players were subsequently held in April with German head coach Michael Nees in attendance, along with ZIFA president Nqobile Magwizi, who told the media: "Zimbabwe is for every Zimbabwean living anywhere."

Other players on ZIFA's radar include 17-year-old striker Shumaira Mheuka, who is at Chelsea, and Reading midfielder Tivonge Rushesha, who played for Wales at Under-17 level in 2018.

Eligible players will be called up to a training camp this summer in Morocco as Zimbabwe looks to grow its playing pool at every level.

British-born... Tawanda Chirewa during a loan spell at Derby County

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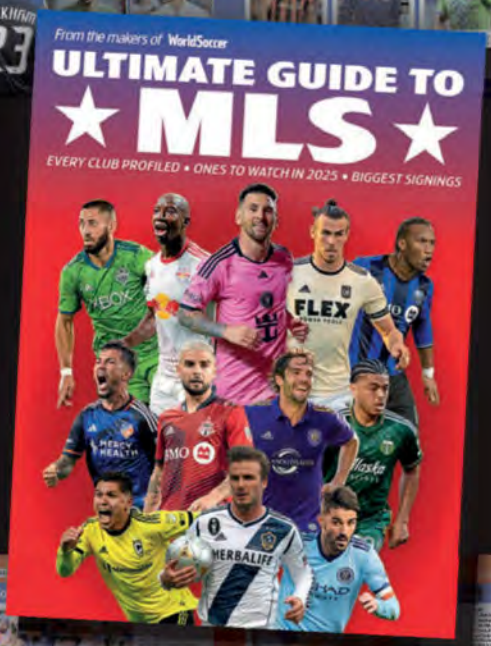

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Tales from the 211

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Going up... FC Andorra came through the Spanish second-tier play-offs in July

FC ANDORRA COMPLETE QUIRKY LA LIGA 2 LINE-UP

There was no local league to join when FC Andorra were founded back in the 1940s, so the club hopped across the border and entered the Spanish football pyramid, where they have played ever since. But it was not until they were purchased by Gerard Pique's Kosmos Holding Group in December 2018 that *Els Tricolors* really started to rise through the ranks, climbing from the fifth to the second tier in the space of only four years. After a season back in the third division last term, they returned to the second tier via the play-offs this summer.

For their first game back, the fixture computer has handed them an away journey to Las Palmas in Gran Canaria. Located off the west coast of Africa at a distance of 2,211 km as the crow flies, it is not only the biggest away trip in Spanish football but in the whole of Western Europe – and is only surpassed in UEFA by fixtures in Russia and Kazakhstan.

But that won't be FC Andorra's only away trip to an opponent located outside mainland Spain this season. Ceuta, who are based in a small Spanish exclave in continental Africa, also gained promotion to the second tier last term, which means that La Liga 2 will be home to an exclave club, a foreign club and an island club this season.

The trip to Ceuta will likely be more arduous. The exclave does not have an airport, so the journey will probably have to be made by ferry. That was a trip that Barcelona did not fancy when they were drawn away to Ceuta in the Copa del Rey in 2023 – the Catalans travelled across the Strait of Gibraltar by helicopter instead.

SFK 2000 EXTEND WORLD RECORD

In recent years, the likes of Bayern Munich, Red Star Belgrade and Ludogorets have all dominated their domestic leagues with lengthy title-winning streaks. But even their long runs are eclipsed by SFK 2000 of the Bosnia & Herzegovina Women's Premier League, who this past season claimed their 23rd consecutive title – a feat officially recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records*.

The league only launched in 2001, meaning the Sarajevo side have won the competition every season bar the inaugural one. They have struggled to assert themselves on the continental stage, however – most notably in 2018-19, when they were comprehensively dispatched 11-0 on aggregate by Chelsea in the UEFA Women's Champions League round of 32.

In a bid to raise the level of competition at home and bridge the gap internationally, the possibility of creating a cross-border league with top clubs from neighbouring countries like Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia has been discussed. While such a regional competition would be fraught with security concerns in the men's game, the atmosphere in women's football is seen as more conducive to collaboration.

But for now, the money needed to launch a fully-fledged cross-border league simply isn't there. If it were, SFK 2000 would face much stiffer competition on a weekly basis – and titles might not be quite so easy to come by.

HJK HELSINKI BEAT THEIR OWN RESERVES

When HJK Helsinki advanced to the last eight of the Finnish Cup, they did not need to wait for the draw to discover their next opponents. The competition regulations state that clubs must face their own reserve side by the quarter-finals at the latest if both teams are still in the tournament. And with their second team, Klubi 04, having also navigated the round of 16, Finland's record champions were handed a quarter-final away trip to their own stadium.

They unsurprisingly strolled to a comfortable 4-0 victory, sparing themselves the ignominy of losing to their own reserves – a fate that had been suffered three years prior by fellow Finnish club Ilves, who lost to a 95th-minute own goal. And though not quite the same, third-tier Austrian club FC Pasching eliminated Red Bull Salzburg – with whom they had a partnership at the time – in the semi-finals of the 2013 OFB Cup, which they went on to win.

National teams have also been eliminated from competitions by their own reserves. In the 2022 MSG Prime Minister's Cup – a six-team tournament for Pacific nations in Vanuatu – the host country's B-team joined to make up the numbers and ended up knocking out the senior side in the group phase. Prior to that, Rwanda's B-team had almost faced the A-team in the final of the 1999 CECAFA Cup, a competition for East and Central African nations. But while the A-team lost on penalties in the semi-final, the B-team went on to win the whole thing.

MARSHALL ISLANDS MAKE SENIOR BOW

The Marshall Islands, a sprawling archipelago in the Pacific, will play their first-ever senior international football match when they take on the US Virgin Islands at the Outrigger Challenge Cup in Arkansas on August 14.

The Marshall Islands Soccer Federation crowdfunded more than £20,000 to organise the four-team tournament, which will take place in Springdale, Arkansas in the United States. Turks & Caicos Islands are also involved, along with local youth team Ozark United.

The Marshall Islands' debut means that Nauru, the world's smallest island nation, will be left as the only country in the world to have never taken part in an 11 v 11 game.

Lee Wingate

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2025 CONCACAF GOLD CUP

CANADA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Dayne **ST CLAIR**	(28) 09.05.97	Minnesota United (USA)
16	Maxime **CREPEAU**	(31) 11.04.94	Portland Timbers (USA)
18	Tom **McGILL**	(25) 25.03.00	Brighton (Eng)

DEFENDERS

2	Alistair **JOHNSTON**	(26) 08.10.98	Celtic (Sco)
3	Zorhan **BASSONG**	(26) 07.05.99	Sporting Kansas City (USA)
4	Kamal **MILLER**	(28) 16.05.97	Portland Timbers (USA)
5	Joel **WATERMAN**	(29) 24.01.96	CF Montreal
13	Derek **CORNELIUS**	(27) 25.11.97	Marseille (Fra)
15	Luc **DE FOUGEROLLES**	(19) 12.10.05	Fulham (Eng)
22	Richie **LARYEA**	(30) 07.01.95	Toronto FC
26	Jamie **KNIGHT-LEBEL**	(20) 24.12.04	Crewe Alexandra (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Mathieu **CHOINIERE**	(26) 07.02.99	Grasshopper (Sui)
7	Stephen **EUSTAQUIO**	(28) 21.12.96	Porto (Por)
8	Ismael **KONE**	(22) 16.06.02	Rennes (Fra)
14	Jacob **SHAFFELBURG**	(25) 26.11.99	Nashville SC (USA)
17	Tajon **BUCHANAN**	(26) 08.02.99	Villarreal (Spa)
19	Nathan **SALIBA**	(21) 07.02.04	CF Montreal
20	Ali **AHMED**	(24) 10.10.00	Vancouver Whitecaps
21	Jonathan **OSORIO**	(33) 12.06.92	Toronto FC
23	Niko **SIGUR**	(21) 09.09.03	Hajduk Split (Cro)

FORWARDS

9	Cyle **LARIN**	(30) 17.04.95	Mallorca (Spa)
10	Jonathan **DAVID**	(25) 14.01.00	Lille (Fra)
11	Daniel **JEBBISON**	(21) 11.07.03	Bournemouth (Eng)
12	Tani **OLUWASEYI**	(25) 15.05.00	Minnesota United (USA)
24	Promise **DAVID**	(23) 03.07.01	Union SG (Bel)
25	Jayden **NELSON**	(22) 26.09.02	Vancouver Whitecaps

COACH

Jesse **MARSCH** (USA)	(51) 08.11.73	

COSTA RICA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Keylor **NAVAS**	(38) 15.12.86	Newell's Old Boys (Arg)
18	Alexandre **LEZCANO**	(23) 26.08.01	San Carlos
23	Patrick **SEQUEIRA**	(26) 01.03.99	Casa Pia (Por)

DEFENDERS

2	Santiago **VAN DER PUTTEN**	(20) 25.06.04	Alajuelense
3	Jeyland **MITCHELL**	(20) 29.09.04	Feyenoord (Ned)
4	Juan Pablo **VARGAS**	(30) 06.06.95	Millonarios (Col)
5	Fernan **FAERRON**	(24) 22.08.00	Herediano
6	Alexis **GAMBOA**	(26) 20.03.99	Alajuelense
8	Joseph **MORA**	(32) 15.01.93	Saprissa
11	Ariel **LASSITER**	(30) 27.09.94	Portland Timbers (USA)
15	Francisco **CALVO**	(32) 08.07.92	Hatayspor (Tur)
24	Guillermo **VILLALOBOS**	(24) 07.06.01	Alajuelense
26	Kenay **MYRIE**	(18) 06.09.06	Saprissa

MIDFIELDERS

10	Brandon **AGUILERA**	(21) 28.06.03	Rio Ave (Por)
13	Jefferson **BRENES**	(28) 13.04.97	Saprissa
14	Orlando **GALO**	(24) 11.08.00	Riga (Lva)
16	Alejandro **BRAN**	(24) 05.03.01	Alajuelense
25	Cristopher **NUNEZ**	(27) 08.12.97	Cartagines

FORWARDS

7	Andy **ROJAS**	(19) 05.12.05	New York Red Bulls II (USA)
9	Manfred **UGALDE**	(23) 25.05.02	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
12	Alonso **MARTINEZ**	(26) 15.10.98	New York City FC (USA)
17	Warren **MADRIGAL**	(20) 24.07.04	Valencia Mestalla (Spa)
19	Kenneth **VARGAS**	(23) 17.04.02	Hearts (Sco)
20	Josimar **ALCOCER**	(20) 07.07.04	Westerlo (Bel)
21	Alvaro **ZAMORA**	(23) 09.03.02	Aris Thessaloniki (Gre)
22	Carlos **MORA**	(24) 18.03.01	Universitatea Craiova (Rou)

COACH

Miguel **HERRERA** (Mex)	(57) 18.03.68	

CURACAO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Eloy **ROOM**	(36) 06.02.89	Cercle Brugge (Bel)
22	Tyrick **BODAK**	(23) 15.05.02	Telstar (Ned)
23	Trevor **DOORNBUSCH**	(25) 06.07.99	VVV Venlo (Ned)

DEFENDERS

2	Cuco **MARTINA**	(35) 25.09.89	Unattached
3	Jurien **GAARI**	(31) 23.12.93	Al Hazem (KSA)
4	Roshon **VAN EIJMA**	(27) 09.06.98	RKC Waalwijk (Ned)
5	Sherel **FLORANUS**	(26) 23.08.98	PEC Zwolle (Ned)
15	Ar'jany **MARTHA**	(21) 04.09.03	Beerschot (Bel)
20	Joshua **BRENET**	(31) 20.03.94	Al Rayyan (Qat)
24	Tyrique **MERCERA**	(21) 19.12.03	SC Cambuur (Ned)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Godfried **ROEMERATOE**	(25) 19.08.99	RKC Waalwijk (Ned)
7	Juninho **BACUNA**	(27) 07.08.97	Al Wehda (KSA)
8	Livano **COMENENCIA**	(21) 03.02.04	Juventus (Ita)
10	Leandro **BACUNA**	(33) 21.08.91	Groningen (Ned)
12	Rayvien **ROSARIO**	(21) 11.04.04	Excelsior (Ned)
21	Kevin **FELIDA**	(25) 11.11.99	RKC Waalwijk (Ned)

FORWARDS

9	Jurgen **LOCADIA**	(31) 07.11.93	Intercity (Spa)
11	Jeremy **ANTONISSE**	(23) 29.03.02	Moreirense (Por)
13	Joshua **ZIMMERMAN**	(24) 23.05.01	TOP Oss (Ned)
14	Kenji **GORRE**	(30) 29.09.94	Umm Salal (Qat)
16	Jearl **MARGARITHA**	(25) 10.04.00	Phoenix Rising (USA)
17	Brandley **KUWAS**	(32) 19.09.92	Volendam (Ned)
18	Rangelo **JANGA**	(33) 16.04.92	FC Eindhoven (Ned)
19	Gervane **KASTANEER**	(29) 09.06.96	Persib Bandung (Idn)

COACH

Dick **ADVOCAAT** (Ned)	(77) 27.09.47	

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Miguel **LLOYD**	(42) 23.10.82	Cibao
12	Xavier **VALDEZ**	(21) 23.11.03	Nashville SC (USA)
22	Wilkins **GERALDO**	(17) 27.05.08	Rayo Majadahonda (Spa)

DEFENDERS

2	Joao **URBAEZ**	(22) 24.07.02	Leganes (Spa)
3	Junior **FIRPO**	(28) 22.08.96	Leeds United (Eng)
4	Edgar **PUJOL**	(20) 07.08.04	Real Madrid Castilla (Spa)
5	Noah **DOLLENMAYER**	(25) 26.10.99	El Paso Locomotive (USA)
15	Miguel Angel **BELTRE**	(21) 12.07.03	Azuqueca (Spa)
18	Jimmy **KAPAROS**	(23) 25.12.01	Rot-Weiss Essen (Ger)
21	Juan **CASTILLO**	(25) 13.01.00	RKC Waalwijk (Ned)
23	Luiyi **DE LUCAS**	(30) 31.08.94	Nea Salamis Famagusta (Cyp)
24	Michael **SAMBATARO**	(22) 04.12.02	Unattached

MIDFIELDERS

6	Pablo **ROSARIO**	(28) 07.01.97	Nice (Fra)
8	Heinz **MORSCHEL**	(27) 24.08.97	Vizela (Por)
10	Ronaldo **VASQUEZ**	(25) 30.06.99	Sumgayit (Aze)
13	Edison **AZCONA**	(21) 21.11.03	Las Vegas Lights (USA)
14	Jean Carlos **LOPEZ**	(31) 09.11.93	Cibao
16	Juanca **PINEDA**	(25) 12.01.00	Beroe Stara Zagora (Bul)
20	Lucas **BRETON**	(18) 20.11.06	Atletico Malagueno (Spa)
26	Angel **MONTES DE OCA**	(22) 18.02.03	Cibao

FORWARDS

7	Rafael **NUNEZ**	(23) 25.01.02	Cartagena (Spa)
9	Mariano **DIAZ**	(31) 01.08.93	Unattached
11	Edarlyn **REYES**	(27) 30.09.97	Arsenal Tula (Rus)
17	Dorny **ROMERO**	(27) 24.01.98	Bolivar (Bol)
19	Peter **GONZALEZ**	(22) 25.07.02	Getafe (Spa)
25	Erick **JAPA**	(26) 06.04.99	Umecit (Pan)

COACH

Marcelo **NEVELEFF** (Arg)	(62) 09.03.63	

EL SALVADOR

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mario **GONZALEZ**	(28) 20.05.97	Alianza
18	Kevin **CARABANTES**	(32) 06.02.93	FAS
22	Benji **VILLALOBOS**	(36) 18.07.88	Aguila

DEFENDERS

2	Julio **SIBRIAN**	(28) 17.07.96	Aguila
3	Roberto **DOMINGUEZ**	(28) 09.05.97	Isidro Metapan
4	Jorge **CRUZ**	(25) 24.01.00	FAS
5	Diego **FLORES**	(23) 01.07.01	Luis Angel Firpo
13	Alexander **LARIN**	(32) 27.06.92	Aguila
16	Henry **ROMERO**	(33) 17.10.91	Alianza
21	Bryan **TAMACAS**	(30) 21.02.95	FAS
26	Mauricio **CERRITOS**	(21) 17.10.03	Luis Angel Firpo

MIDFIELDERS

7	Darwin **CEREN**	(35) 31.12.89	Aguila
8	Bryan **LANDAVERDE**	(30) 27.05.95	Luis Angel Firpo
10	Enrico **DUENAS**	(24) 23.02.01	TOP Oss (Ned)
11	Josue **RIVERA**	(26) 09.03.99	Isidro Metapan
15	Jefferson **VALLADARES**	(22) 08.12.02	Municipal Limeno
17	Jairo **HENRIQUEZ**	(31) 31.08.93	Aguila
20	Harold **OSORIO**	(21) 20.08.03	Chicago Fire (USA)
23	Melvin **CARTAGENA**	(25) 30.07.99	Isidro Metapan
25	Elvin **ALVARADO**	(26) 23.08.98	Isidro Metapan

FORWARDS

6	Steven **GUERRA**	(20) 12.03.05	Isidro Metapan
9	Brayan **GIL**	(23) 28.06.01	Baltika Kaliningrad (Rus)
12	Santos **ORTIZ**	(35) 22.01.90	Aguila
14	Rafael **TEJADA**	(22) 12.03.03	FAS
19	Emerson **MAURICIO**	(22) 27.08.02	Alianza
24	Brandon **RAMIREZ**	(16) 05.09.08	Turin FESA

COACH

Hernan Dario **GOMEZ** (Col)	(69) 03.02.56	

GUADELOUPE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Rubens **ADELAIDE**	(26) 15.12.98	Chambly (Fra)
16	Brice **COGNARD**	(35) 26.04.90	Chateauroux (Fra)
23	Davy **ROUYARD**	(25) 17.08.99	Bordeaux (Fra)

DEFENDERS

2	Zoran **MOCO**	(21) 27.06.03	Dijon (Fra)
4	Jerome **ROUSSILLON**	(32) 06.01.93	Union Berlin (Ger)
5	Nathanael **SAINTINI**	(25) 30.05.00	Martigues (Fra)
15	Dimitri **CAVARE**	(30) 05.02.95	Umraniyespor (Tur)
19	Meddy **LINA**	(39) 11.01.86	Jeunesse Evolution
21	Keyvan **BEAUMONT**	(19) 18.07.05	La Gauloise
25	Christopher **JULLIEN**	(32) 22.03.93	Montpellier (Fra)
26	Yvann **MACON**	(26) 01.10.98	Saint-Etienne (Fra)

MIDFIELDERS

3	Alexandre **ARENATE**	(29) 20.07.95	Jeunesse Esch (Lux)
6	Anthony **BARON**	(32) 29.12.92	Servette (Sui)
7	Noah **CADIOU**	(26) 26.10.98	Rodez (Fra)
8	Ange-Freddy **PLUMAIN**	(30) 02.03.95	Nea Salamina (Cyp)
12	Junior **SENNEVILLE**	(34) 31.01.91	Dunkerque (Fra)
18	Jordan **LEBORGNE**	(29) 29.09.95	Quevilly-Rouen (Fra)
24	Johan **ANGLOMA**	(31) 18.10.93	L'Etoile

FORWARDS

9	Thierry **AMBROSE**	(28) 28.03.97	Kortrijk (Bel)
10	Matthias **PHAETON**	(25) 08.01.00	CSKA Sofia (Bul)
11	Tairyk **ARCONTE**	(21) 12.11.03	Pau (Fra)
13	Florian **DAVID**	(32) 16.11.92	Swift Hesperange (Lux)
14	Kilian **BEVIS**	(27) 13.02.98	Radnicki Kragujevac (Srb)
17	Kenny **MIXTUR**	(21) 09.10.03	Progres Niederkorn (Lux)
20	Raphael **MIRVAL**	(29) 04.05.96	Baie-Mahault
22	Vikash **TILLE**	(27) 26.11.97	CSM

COACH

Jocelyn **ANGLOMA**	(59) 07.08.65	

GUATEMALA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Nicholas **HAGEN**	(28) 02.08.96	Columbus Crew (USA)
12	Kenderson **NAVARRO**	(23) 25.02.02	Municipal
21	Luis **MORAN**	(29) 31.05.96	Antigua

DEFENDERS

2	Jose **ARDON**	(25) 20.01.00	Antigua
3	Nicolas **SAMAYOA**	(29) 02.08.95	Politehnica Iasi (Rou)
4	Jose Carlos **PINTO**	(31) 16.06.93	Comunicaciones
7	Aaron **HERRERA**	(28) 06.06.97	D.C. United (USA)
13	Stheven **ROBLES**	(29) 12.11.95	Comunicaciones
16	Jose **MORALES**	(28) 03.12.96	Municipal
24	Carlos **AGUILAR**	(18) 25.10.06	Malacateco

MIDFIELDERS

5	Jose **ROSALES**	(31) 24.06.93	Antigua
8	Rodrigo **SARAVIA**	(32) 22.02.93	Municipal
10	Pedro **ALTAN**	(28) 04.06.97	Municipal
17	Oscar **CASTELLANOS**	(25) 18.01.00	Antigua
22	Jonathan **FRANCO**	(21) 26.07.03	Municipal
25	Kevin **RAMIREZ**	(22) 01.08.02	Malacateco
26	Matt **EVANS**	(19) 25.05.06	Los Angeles FC (USA)

FORWARDS

6	Erick **LEMUS**	(24) 05.02.01	Comunicaciones
9	Rubio **RUBIN**	(29) 01.03.96	Charleston Battery (USA)
11	Rudy **MUNOZ**	(20) 06.02.05	Municipal
14	Darwin **LOM**	(27) 14.07.97	Comunicaciones
15	Damian **RIVERA**	(22) 08.12.02	Phoenix Rising (USA)
18	Oscar **SANTIS**	(26) 25.03.99	Antigua
19	Arquimides **ORDONEZ**	(21) 05.08.03	Zimbru Chisinau (Mda)
20	Olger **ESCOBAR**	(18) 11.09.06	CF Montreal (Can)
23	Elmer **CARDOZA**	(22) 29.07.02	Xelaju

COACH

Luis Fernando **TENA** (Mex)	(67) 20.01.58	

HAITI

GOALKEEPERS

1	Johny **PLACIDE**	(37) 29.01.88	Bastia (Fra)
12	Alexandre **PIERRE**	(24) 25.02.01	Sochaux (Fra)
23	Garissone **INNOCENT**	(25) 16.04.00	Riteriai (Ltu)

DEFENDERS

2	Carlens **ARCUS**	(28) 28.06.96	Angers (Fra)
3	Francois **DULYSSE**	(26) 13.04.99	Egnatia (Alb)
4	Ricardo **ADE**	(35) 21.05.90	LDU Quito (Ecu)
6	Garven **METUSALA**	(25) 31.12.99	Colorado Springs Switchbacks (USA)
8	Martin **EXPERIENCE**	(26) 09.03.99	Nancy (Fra)
13	Duke **LACROIX**	(31) 14.10.93	Colorado Springs Switchbacks (USA)
22	Jean-Kevin **DUVERNE**	(27) 12.07.97	Kortrijk (Bel)
24	Wilguens **PAUGAIN**	(23) 24.08.01	Zulte Waregem (Bel)

MIDFIELDERS

5	Daniel **SAINT-FLEUR**	(25) 13.10.99	Real Hope
7	Fafa **PICAULT**	(34) 23.02.91	Inter Miami (USA)
10	Don Deedson **LOUICIUS**	(24) 11.02.01	OB (Den)
11	Dany **JEAN**	(22) 28.11.02	Torreense (Por)
14	Leverton **PIERRE**	(27) 09.03.98	Chateauroux (Fra)
17	Danley **JEAN JACQUES**	(25) 20.05.00	Philadelphia Union (USA)
19	Belmar **JOSEPH**	(19) 13.10.05	Sion (Sui)
21	Christopher **ATTYS**	(24) 13.03.01	Triestina (Ita)

FORWARDS

9	Duckens **NAZON**	(31) 07.04.94	Kayserispor (Tur)
15	Mikael **CANTAVE**	(28) 25.10.96	Vancouver FC (Can)
16	Mondy **PRUNIER**	(25) 22.12.99	Francs Borains (Bel)
18	Ruben **PROVIDENCE**	(23) 07.07.01	Almere City (Ned)
20	Frantzdy **PIERROT**	(30) 29.03.95	AEK Athens (Gre)
25	Teo James **MICHEL**	(21) 03.05.04	Chateauroux (Fra)

COACH

Sebastien **MIGNE** (Fra)	(52) 30.11.72	

HONDURAS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Edrick **MENJIVAR**	(32) 01.03.93	Olimpia
22	Luis **LOPEZ**	(31) 13.09.93	Real Espana
25	Marlon **LICONA**	(34) 09.02.91	Motagua

DEFENDERS

2	Denil **MALDONADO**	(27) 26.05.98	Universitatea Craiova (Rou)
3	Julian **MARTINEZ**	(21) 01.12.03	Olimpia
4	Luis **VEGA**	(24) 28.02.01	Motagua
6	Cristopher **MELENDEZ**	(27) 25.11.97	Motagua
8	Joseph **ROSALES**	(24) 06.11.00	Minnesota United (USA)
15	Getsel **MONTES**	(28) 23.06.96	Herediano (Crc)
24	Raul **GARCIA**	(21) 13.03.04	UPNFM
26	Luis **CRISANTO**	(25) 01.03.00	Juticalpa

MIDFIELDERS

5	Kervin **ARRIAGA**	(27) 05.01.98	Real Zaragoza (Spa)
10	Alexander **LOPEZ**	(33) 05.06.92	Olancho
13	Carlos **MEJIA**	(25) 19.02.00	Motagua
16	Edwin **RODRIGUEZ**	(25) 25.09.99	Olimpia
19	Carlos **PINEDA**	(27) 23.09.97	Olimpia
20	Deiby **FLORES**	(28) 16.06.96	Toronto FC (Can)
23	Jorge **ALVAREZ**	(27) 29.01.98	Olimpia

FORWARDS

7	Jose **PINTO**	(27) 27.09.97	Olimpia
9	Anthony **LOZANO**	(32) 25.04.93	Santos Laguna (Mex)
11	Jorge **BENGUCHE**	(29) 21.05.96	Olimpia
12	Romell **QUIOTO**	(33) 09.08.91	Al Arabi (KSA)
14	Alexy **VEGA**	(28) 16.09.96	Marathon
17	Luis **PALMA**	(25) 17.01.00	Olympiacos (Gre)
18	Dixon **RAMIREZ**	(24) 15.04.01	Real Espana
21	Yustin **ARBOLEDA**	(33) 18.09.91	Olimpia

COACH

Reinaldo **RUEDA** (Col)	(68) 16.04.57	

JAMAICA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Andre **BLAKE**	(34) 21.11.90	Philadelphia Union (USA)
13	Shaquan **DAVIS**	(24) 11.11.00	Mount Pleasant
23	Jahmali **WAITE**	(26) 24.12.98	El Paso Locomotive (USA)

DEFENDERS

2	Dexter **LEMBIKISA**	(21) 04.11.03	Barnsley (Eng)
3	Amari'i **BELL**	(31) 05.05.94	Luton Town (Eng)
5	Ethan **PINNOCK**	(32) 29.05.93	Brentford (Eng)
6	Richard **KING**	(23) 27.11.01	Cavalier
14	Sue-Lae **McCALLA**	(32) 24.11.92	Mount Pleasant
15	Joel **LATIBEAUDIERE**	(25) 06.01.00	Coventry City (Eng)
17	Damion **LOWE**	(32) 05.05.93	Al Okhdood (KSA)
19	Kyle **MING**	(26) 25.01.99	Mount Pleasant
22	Greg **LEIGH**	(30) 30.09.94	Oxford United (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Karoy **ANDERSON**	(20) 01.10.04	Charlton Athletic (Eng)
8	Kasey **PALMER**	(28) 09.11.96	Hull City (Eng)
12	Dwayne **ATKINSON**	(23) 05.05.02	Cavalier
18	Jon **RUSSELL**	(24) 09.10.00	Barnsley (Eng)

FORWARDS

7	Leon **BAILEY**	(27) 09.08.97	Aston Villa (Eng)
9	Kaheim **DIXON**	(20) 04.10.04	Charlton Athletic (Eng)
10	Rumarn **BURRELL**	(24) 16.12.00	Burton Albion (Eng)
11	Demarai **GRAY**	(28) 28.06.96	Al Ettifaq (KSA)
16	Warner **BROWN**	(22) 19.08.02	Arnett Gardens
20	Renaldo **CEPHAS**	(25) 08.10.99	Ankaragucu (Tur)
21	Romario **WILLIAMS**	(30) 15.08.94	Indy Eleven (USA)
24	Tyreece **CAMPBELL**	(21) 14.09.03	Charlton Athletic (Eng)
25	Bobby **DE CORDOVA-REID**	(32) 02.02.93	Leicester City (Eng)
26	Michail **ANTONIO**	(35) 28.03.90	West Ham United (Eng)

COACH

Steve **McCLAREN** (Eng)	(64) 03.05.61	

MEXICO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Luis **MALAGON**	(28) 02.03.97	America
12	Raul **RANGEL**	(25) 25.02.00	Guadalajara
13	Guillermo **OCHOA**	(39) 13.07.85	AVS (Por)

DEFENDERS

2	Jorge **SANCHEZ**	(27) 10.12.97	Cruz Azul
3	Cesar **MONTES**	(28) 24.02.97	Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
5	Johan **VASQUEZ**	(26) 22.10.98	Genoa (Ita)
15	Israel **REYES**	(25) 23.05.00	America
19	Jesus **OROZCO**	(23) 19.02.02	Cruz Azul
22	Julian **ARAUJO**	(23) 13.08.01	Bournemouth (Eng)
23	Jesus **GALLARDO**	(30) 15.08.94	Toluca
26	Mateo **CHAVEZ**	(21) 11.05.04	AZ (Ned)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Edson **ALVAREZ**	(27) 24.10.97	West Ham United (Eng)
6	Erik **LIRA**	(25) 08.05.00	Cruz Azul
7	Gilberto **MORA**	(16) 14.10.08	Tijuana
8	Carlos **RODRIGUEZ**	(28) 03.01.97	Cruz Azul
14	Marcel **RUIZ**	(24) 26.10.00	Toluca
17	Orbelin **PINEDA**	(29) 24.03.96	AEK Athens (Gre)
20	Efrain **ALVAREZ**	(22) 19.06.02	Guadalajara
24	Luis **CHAVEZ**	(29) 15.01.96	Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
25	Roberto **ALVARADO**	(26) 07.09.98	Guadalajara

FORWARDS

9	Raul **JIMENEZ**	(34) 05.05.91	Fulham (Eng)
10	Alexis **VEGA**	(27) 25.11.97	Toluca
11	Santiago **GIMENEZ**	(24) 18.04.01	Milan (Ita)
16	Julian **QUINONES**	(28) 24.03.97	Al Qadsiah (KSA)
18	Angel **SEPULVEDA**	(34) 15.02.91	Cruz Azul
21	Cesar **HUERTA**	(24) 03.12.00	Anderlecht (Bel)

COACH

Javier **AGUIRRE**	(66) 01.12.58	

PANAMA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Luis **MEJIA**	(34) 16.03.91	Nacional (Uru)
12	John **GUNN**	(25) 24.01.00	New England Revolution II (USA)
22	Orlando **MOSQUERA**	(30) 25.12.94	Al Fayha (KSA)

DEFENDERS

2	Cesar **BLACKMAN**	(27) 02.04.98	Slovan Bratislava (Svk)
3	Jose **CORDOBA**	(24) 03.06.01	Norwich City (Eng)
4	Fidel **ESCOBAR**	(30) 09.01.95	Saprissa (Crc)
5	Edgardo **FARINA**	(23) 21.09.01	Khimki (Rus)
14	Carlos **HARVEY**	(25) 03.02.00	Minnesota United (USA)
15	Eric **DAVIS**	(34) 31.03.91	Vila Nova (Bra)
16	Andres **ANDRADE**	(26) 16.10.98	LASK (Aut)
19	Ivan **ANDERSON**	(27) 24.11.97	Marathon (Hon)
23	Michael **MURILLO**	(29) 11.02.96	Marseille (Fra)
26	Jorge **GUTIERREZ**	(26) 01.09.98	Deportivo La Guaira (Ven)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Cristian **MARTINEZ**	(28) 06.02.97	Ironi Kiryat (Isr)
7	Jose Luis **RODRIGUEZ**	(26) 19.06.98	Juarez (Mex)
8	Victor **GRIFFITH**	(24) 12.12.00	St Johnstone (Sco)
13	Janpol **MORALES**	(26) 22.06.98	Macara (Ecu)
20	Anibal **GODOY**	(35) 10.02.90	San Diego FC (USA)
21	Cesar **YANIS**	(29) 28.01.96	Cobresal (Chi)
25	Edward **CEDENO**	(21) 05.07.03	Tarazona (Spa)

FORWARDS

9	Eduardo **GUERRERO**	(25) 21.02.00	Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr)
10	Ismael **DIAZ**	(28) 12.05.97	Universidad Catolica (Ecu)
11	Azarias **LONDONO**	(23) 21.06.01	Universidad Catolica (Ecu)
17	Kahiser **LENIS**	(23) 23.07.01	Jaguares de Cordoba (Col)
18	Gustavo **HERRERA**	(19) 19.11.05	Club Puebla (Mex)
24	Tomas **RODRIGUEZ**	(26) 09.03.99	Monagas (Ven)

COACH

Thomas **CHRISTIANSEN** (Spa)	(52) 11.03.73	

SAUDI ARABIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Nawaf **AL AQIDI**	(25) 10.05.00	Al Fateh
21	Abdulrahman **AL SANBI**	(24) 03.02.01	Al Ahli
22	Ahmed **AL KASSAR**	(34) 08.05.91	Al Qadsiah

DEFENDERS

2	Muhannad **AL SHANQEETI**	(26) 12.03.99	Al Ittihad
3	Salem **AL NAJDI**	(22) 27.01.03	Al Nassr
4	Abdulelah **AL AMRI**	(28) 15.01.97	Al Ittihad
5	Abdullah **MADU**	(31) 15.07.93	Al Ettifaq
12	Saud **ABDULHAMID**	(25) 18.07.99	Roma (Ita)
13	Nawaf **BOUSHAL**	(25) 16.09.99	Al Nassr
14	Hassan **KADESH**	(32) 27.09.92	Al Ittihad
26	Ali **MAJRASHI**	(25) 01.10.99	Al Ahli

MIDFIELDERS

6	Ali **AL HASSAN**	(28) 04.03.97	Al Nassr
7	Mukhtar **ALI**	(27) 30.10.97	Al Ettifaq
10	Faisal **AL GHAMDI**	(23) 13.08.01	Beerschot (Bel)
15	Ayman **YAHYA**	(24) 14.05.01	Al Nassr
16	Ziyad **AL JOHANI**	(23) 11.11.01	Al Ahli
17	Mohammed **BAKOR**	(21) 08.04.04	Al Ahli
18	Muhannad **AL SAAD**	(21) 29.06.03	Dunkerque (Fra)
19	Turki **AL AMMAR**	(25) 23.09.99	Al Qadsiah
23	Ali **AL ASMARI**	(28) 12.01.97	Al Ahli
24	Abdulrahman **AL ABOUD**	(30) 01.06.95	Al Ittihad
25	Hammam **AL HAMMAMI**	(21) 30.01.04	Al Kholood

FORWARDS

8	Marwan **AL SAHAFI**	(21) 17.02.04	Beerschot (Bel)
9	Firas **AL BURAIKAN**	(25) 14.05.00	Al Ahli
11	Saleh **AL SHEHRI**	(31) 01.11.93	Al Ittihad
20	Abdullah **AL SALEM**	(32) 19.12.92	Al Khaleej

COACH

Herve **RENARD** (Fra)	(56) 30.09.68	

SURINAME

GOALKEEPERS

1	Warner **HAHN**	(32) 15.06.92	Hammarby (Swe)
13	Jonathan **FONKEL**	(20) 15.04.05	Robinhood
23	Etienne **VAESSEN**	(29) 26.07.95	Groningen (Ned)
26	Ishan **KORT**	(25) 01.06.00	Hebar Pazardzhik (Bul)

DEFENDERS

2	Anfernee **DIJKSTEEL**	(28) 27.10.96	Middlesbrough (Eng)
3	Liam **VAN GELDEREN**	(24) 23.03.01	RKC Waalwijk (Ned)
4	Dion **MALONE**	(36) 13.02.89	Karmiotissa Polemidion (Cyp)
5	Ridgeciano **HAPS**	(32) 12.06.93	Venezia (Ita)
12	Myenty **ABENA**	(30) 12.12.94	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
15	Yannick **LELIENDAL**	(23) 23.04.02	Volendam (Ned)
17	Djevencio **VAN DER KUST**	(24) 30.04.01	Beerschot (Bel)
19	Shaquille **PINAS**	(27) 19.03.98	Hammarby (Swe)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Immanuel **PHERAI**	(24) 25.04.01	Hamburg (Ger)
8	Justin **LONWIJK**	(25) 21.12.99	Viborg (Den)
10	Denzel **JUBITANA**	(26) 06.05.99	Atromitos (Gre)
14	Jean-Paul **BOETIUS**	(31) 22.03.94	Darmstadt (Ger)
16	Renske **ADIPI**	(25) 01.08.99	Robinhood
18	Jayden **TURFKRUIER**	(22) 25.09.02	Telstar (Ned)
22	Kenneth **PAAL**	(27) 24.06.97	Queens Park Rangers (Eng)
24	Dhoraso **KLAS**	(24) 30.01.01	Iberia 1999 (Geo)

FORWARDS

7	Gyrano **KERK**	(29) 02.12.95	Antwerp (Bel)
9	Richonell **MARGARET**	(24) 07.09.00	RKC Waalwijk (Ned)
11	Shaquille **STEIN**	(24) 07.07.00	Cavalier (Jam)
20	Gleofilo **VLIJTER**	(25) 17.09.99	OFK Beograd (Srb)
21	Jaden **MONTNOR**	(22) 09.08.02	Aris Limassol (Cyp)
25	Jamilhio **RIGTERS**	(25) 11.11.99	Cavalier (Jam)

COACH

Stanley **MENZO** (Ned)	(61) 15.10.63	

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Marvin **PHILLIP**	(40) 01.08.84	Port of Spain
21	Jabari **ST HILLAIRE**	(25) 19.11.99	Defence Force
22	Denzil **SMITH**	(25) 12.10.99	AV Alta (USA)

DEFENDERS

2	Darnell **HOSPEDALES**	(26) 13.03.99	Montego Bay United (Jam)
4	Sheldon **BATEAU**	(34) 29.01.91	Beveren (Bel)
5	Justin **GARCIA**	(29) 26.10.95	Defence Force
6	Andre **RAYMOND**	(24) 09.11.00	Dunfermline Athletic (Sco)
16	Alvin **JONES**	(30) 09.07.94	Real Sociedad (Hon)
24	Isaiah **GARCIA**	(27) 22.04.98	Defence Force

MIDFIELDERS

3	Joevin **JONES**	(33) 03.08.91	Police FC
7	Steffen **YEATES**	(25) 04.01.00	York United (Can)
8	Daniel **PHILLIPS**	(24) 18.01.01	Stevenage (Eng)
9	Nathaniel **JAMES**	(20) 17.06.04	Portland Hearts of Pine (USA)
10	Kevin **MOLINO**	(34) 17.06.90	Defence Force
11	Levi **GARCIA**	(27) 20.11.97	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
13	Tyrese **SPICER**	(24) 04.12.00	Toronto FC (Can)
14	Wayne **FREDERICK**	(21) 13.06.04	Colorado Rapids (USA)
18	Andre **RAMPERSAD**	(30) 02.02.95	HFX Wanderers (Can)
19	Ajani **FORTUNE**	(22) 30.12.02	Atlanta United (USA)
20	Real **GILL**	(22) 23.01.03	Huntsville City (USA)
23	Noah **POWDER**	(26) 27.10.98	Westchester SC (USA)
25	Kaihim **THOMAS**	(22) 08.02.03	Defence Force

FORWARDS

12	Isaiah **LEACOCK**	(25) 11.11.99	Defence Force
15	Dante **SEALY**	(22) 17.04.03	CF Montreal (Can)
17	Rio **CARDINES**	(19) 07.01.06	Crystal Palace (Eng)
26	Isaiah **LEE**	(25) 21.09.99	La Horquetta Rangers

COACH

Dwight **YORKE**	(53) 03.11.71	

UNITED STATES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matt **TURNER**	(30) 24.06.94	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
25	Matt **FREESE**	(26) 02.09.98	New York City FC
26	Chris **BRADY**	(21) 03.03.04	Chicago Fire

DEFENDERS

2	John **TOLKIN**	(22) 31.07.02	Holstein Kiel (Ger)
3	Chris **RICHARDS**	(25) 28.03.00	Crystal Palace (Eng)
5	Walker **ZIMMERMAN**	(32) 19.05.93	Nashville SC
12	Miles **ROBINSON**	(28) 14.03.97	FC Cincinnati
13	Tim **REAM**	(37) 05.10.87	Charlotte FC
16	Alex **FREEMAN**	(20) 09.08.04	Orlando City
18	Maximilian **ARFSTEN**	(24) 19.04.01	Columbus Crew
20	Nathan **HARRIEL**	(24) 23.04.01	Philadelphia Union
22	Mark **McKENZIE**	(26) 25.02.99	Toulouse (Fra)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Tyler **ADAMS**	(26) 14.02.99	Bournemouth (Eng)
6	Jack **McGLYNN**	(21) 07.07.03	Houston Dynamo
7	Quinn **SULLIVAN**	(21) 27.03.04	Philadelphia Union
8	Sebastian **BERHALTER**	(24) 10.05.01	Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)
10	Diego **LUNA**	(21) 07.09.03	Real Salt Lake
11	Brenden **AARONSON**	(24) 22.10.00	Leeds United (Eng)
14	Luca **DE LA TORRE**	(27) 23.05.98	San Diego FC
15	Johnny **CARDOSO**	(23) 20.09.01	Real Betis (Spa)
17	Malik **TILLMAN**	(23) 28.05.02	PSV (Ned)

FORWARDS

9	Damion **DOWNS**	(20) 06.07.04	Cologne (Ger)
19	Haji **WRIGHT**	(27) 27.03.98	Coventry City (Eng)
21	Paxten **AARONSON**	(21) 26.08.03	Utrecht (Ned)
23	Brian **WHITE**	(29) 03.02.96	Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)
24	Patrick **AGYEMANG**	(24) 07.11.00	Charlotte FC

COACH

Mauricio **POCHETTINO** (Arg)	(53) 02.03.72	

Ages and clubs as per the tournament kick-off date (June 14)

Internationals

2025 CONCACAF GOLD CUP

Group A

Jun 14 – Inglewood
Mexico 3 (Ed. Alvarez 44, Jimenez 47, Montes 53)
Dominican Republic 2 (Gonzalez 51, Azcona 67)

Jun 15 – San Diego
Costa Rica 4 (Martinez 14, Ugalde 19 pen, 90+13 pen, Alcocer 76)
Suriname 3 (Kerk 34, Margaret 59, Pinas 64 pen)

Jun 18 – Arlington
Costa Rica 2 (Ugalde 44 pen, Alcocer 85)
Dominican Republic 1 (Urbaez 16)

Jun 18 – Arlington
Suriname 0
Mexico 2 (Montes 57, 63)

Jun 22 – Paradise
Mexico 0
Costa Rica 0

Jun 22 – Arlington
Dominican Republic 0
Suriname 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Costa Rica (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	4	7
Dominican Rep	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
Suriname	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Group B

Jun 17 – San Jose
Curacao 0
El Salvador 0

Jun 17 – Vancouver
Canada 6 (Sigur 27, Oluwaseyi 45+2, Buchanan 48, 65, P. David 75, Saliba 90)
Honduras 0

Jun 21 – Houston
Curacao 1 (Antonisse 90+4)
Canada 1 (Saliba 9)

Jun 21 – Houston
Honduras 2 (Quioto 33, Ramirez 90+5)
El Salvador 0

Jun 24 – San Jose
Honduras 2 (Alvarez 32, Palma 90+1)
Curacao 1 (Menjivar 42 og)

Jun 24 – Houston
Canada 2 (J. David 53, Buchanan 56)
El Salvador 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Canada (Q)	3	2	1	0	9	1	7
Honduras (Q)	3	2	0	1	4	7	6
Curacao	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
El Salvador	3	0	1	2	0	4	1

Group C

Jun 16 – Carson
Panama 5 (Martinez 6, Diaz 13, 17, Guerrero 22 pen, T. Rodriguez 90+2)
Guadeloupe 2 (Leborgne 29, David 71 pen)

Jun 16 – Carson
Jamaica 0
Guatemala 1 (Santis 32)

Jun 20 – San Jose
Jamaica 2 (Bailey 41, Russell 45+4)
Guadeloupe 1 (Ambrose 32)

Jun 20 – Austin
Guatemala 0
Panama 1 (T. Rodriguez 19)

Jun 24 – Austin
Panama 4 (Diaz 4, 17, 45 pen, T. Rodriguez 89)
Jamaica 1 (Bell 27)

Jun 24 – Houston
Guadeloupe 2 (Plumain 50 pen, Phaeton 78)
Guatemala 3 (Pinto 13 pen, Escobar 29, Rubin 70)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panama (Q)	3	3	0	0	10	3	9
Guatemala (Q)	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Jamaica	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Guadeloupe	3	0	0	3	5	10	0

Group D

Jun 15 – San Jose
United States 5 (Tillman 16, 41, Agyemang 44, B. Aaronson 82, Wright 84)
Trinidad & Tobago 0

Jun 15 – San Diego
Haiti 0
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Shehri 21 pen)

Jun 19 – Houston
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (J. Garcia 68)
Haiti 1 (Pierrot 49)

Jun 19 – Austin
Saudi Arabia 0
United States 1 (Richards 63)

Jun 24 – Paradise
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Buraikan 60)
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Sealy 10)

Jun 23 – Arlington
United States 2 (Tillman 10, Agyemang 75)
Haiti 1 (Louicius 19)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States (Q)	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
Saudi Arabia (Q)	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Trinidad & Tob	3	0	2	1	2	7	2
Haiti	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Quarter-Finals

Jun 28 – Glendale
Panama 1 (Diaz 45+1 pen)
Honduras 1 (Lozano 82)
Honduras win 6-5 on pens

Jun 28 – Glendale
Mexico 2 (Vega 49, Madu 81 og)
Saudi Arabia 0

Jun 29 – Minneapolis
Canada 1 (J. David 30 pen)
Guatemala 1 (Rubin 69)
Guatemala win 6-5 on pens

Jun 29 – Minneapolis
United States 2 (Luna 43, Arfsten 47)
Costa Rica 2 (Calvo 12 pen, Martinez 71)
United States win 4-3 on pens

Semi-Finals

Jul 2 – St Louis
United States 2 (Luna 4, 15)
Guatemala 1 (Escobar 80)

Jul 2 – Santa Clara
Mexico 1 (Jimenez 50)
Honduras 0

Final

Jul 6 – Houston
United States 1 (Richards 4)
Mexico 2 (Jimenez 27, Ed. Alvarez 77)
United States: Freese – Freeman, Richards, Ream, Arfsten (Tolkin 86); Adams (McGlynn 82), De la Torre (Downs 69); Berhalter, Tillman, Luna (B. Aaronson 86); Agyemang.
Mexico: Malagon – Sanchez (Reyes 86), Montes, Vasquez, Gallardo; Mora (Pineda 75), Ed. Alvarez, Ruiz; Alvarado (Huerta 87), Jimenez (Gimenez 86), Vega.

2025 EAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

Jul 7 – Yongin
South Korea 3 (Lee Dong-gyeong 8, Joo Min-kyu 21, Kim Ju-sung 56)
China 0

Jul 8 – Yongin
Japan 6 (Germain 4, 10, 22, 26, Inagaki 20, Nakamura 90+4)
Hong Kong 1 (Orr 59)

Jul 11 – Yongin
Hong Kong 0
South Korea 2 (Kang Sang-yoon 27, Lee Ho-jae 67)

Jul 12 – Yongin
Japan 2 (Hosoya 11, Mochizuki 63)
China 0

Jul 15 – Yongin
China 1 (Huang Zhengyu 20)
Hong Kong 0

Jul 15 – Yongin
South Korea 0
Japan 1 (Germain 8)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan (C)	3	3	0	0	9	1	9
South Korea	3	2	0	1	5	1	6
China	3	1	0	2	1	5	3
Hong Kong	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

2025 EURO UNDER-21S

Group A

Jun 11 – Bratislava
Slovakia 2 (Kopasek 48, Suslov 53 pen)
Spain 3 (Pubill 16, Joseph 18, Tarrega 90)

Jun 11 – Trnava
Italy 1 (Baldanzi 26)
Romania 0

Jun 14 – Bratislava
Spain 2 (Jauregizar 85, Fernandez 88)
Romania 1 (Munteanu 4)

Jun 14 – Trnava
Slovakia 0
Italy 1 (Casadei 7)

Jun 17 – Bratislava
Romania 1 (Akdag 67)
Slovakia 2 (Obert 11, Suslov 57)

Jun 17 – Trnava
Spain 1 (Rodriguez 53)
Italy 1 (Pisilli 59)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	4	7
Italy (Q)	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Slovakia	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Romania	3	0	0	3	2	5	0

Group B

Jun 12 – Dunajska Streda
Czech Republic 1 (Fila 51)
England 3 (Elliott 39, Rowe 48, Cresswell 76)

Jun 12 – Nitra
Germany 3 (Woltemade 19, 42, 82 pen)
Slovenia 0

Jun 15 – Nitra
England 0
Slovenia 0

Jun 15 – Dunajska Streda
Czech Republic 2 (Arrey-Mbi 60 og, Spacil 66)
Germany 4 (Tresoldi 34, Nebel 41, Woltemade 54, Martel 58)

Jun 18 – Dunajska Streda
Slovenia 0
Czech Republic 2 (Fila 48, Sejk 59)

Jun 18 – Nitra
England 1 (Scott 76)
Germany 2 (Knauff 3, Weiper 33)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany (Q)	3	3	0	0	9	3	9
England (Q)	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Czech Rep	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Slovenia	3	0	1	2	0	5	1

Group C

Jun 11 – Trencin
Portugal 0
France 0

Jun 11 – Zilina
Poland 1 (Kaluzinski 73 pen)
Georgia 2 (Lominadze 55, Gordeziani 90+4)

Jun 14 – Trencin
Portugal 5 (Quenda 16, 24, Araujo 30, Bernardo 41, Gomes 63)
Poland 0

Jun 14 – Zilina
France 3 (Tel 35 pen, Lepenant 89, Barry 90+12)
Georgia 2 (Abuashvili 76, Sazonov 84)

Jun 17 – Trencin
Georgia 0
Portugal 4 (Pinheiro 24, Quenda 62, Gomes 87, Araujo 90+5 pen)

Jun 17 – Zilina
France 4 (Zeze 18, Cisse 19, 29, Abline 82)
Poland 1 (Mosor 61)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal (Q)	3	2	1	0	9	0	7
France (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Georgia	3	1	0	2	4	8	3
Poland	3	0	0	3	2	11	0

Group D

Jun 12 – Presov
Ukraine 2 (Voloshyn 22, Braharu 78)
Denmark 3 (Bischoff 63, Boving 81, Osula 85)

Jun 12 – Kosice
Finland 2 (Terho 25, Keskinen 28)
Netherlands 2 (Valente 59, Poku 90+3)

Jun 15 – Kosice
Finland 0
Ukraine 2 (Vanat 28, Braharu 49)

Jun 15 – Presov
Netherlands 1 (Provstgaard 19 og)
Denmark 2 (Osula 35, 47)

Jun 18 – Kosice
Denmark 2 (Harder 10, 68)
Finland 2 (Skytta 73, Keskinen 82)

Jun 18 – Presov
Netherlands 2 (Valente 34, Van Bergen 57)
Ukraine 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	5	7
Netherlands (Q)	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Ukraine	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Finland	3	0	2	1	4	6	2

Quarter-Finals

Jun 21 – Zilina
Portugal 0
Netherlands 1 (Poku 84)

Jun 21 – Trnava
Spain 1 (Guerra 39 pen)
England 3 (McAtee 10, Elliott 15, Anderson 90+4 pen)

Jun 22 – Presov
Denmark 2 (Bischoff 18, Sorensen 49)
France 3 (Cisse 44, Merlin 84, Tel 85)

Jun 22 – Dunajska Streda
Germany 3 (Woltemade 68, Weiper 87, Rohl 117)
Italy 2 (Koleosho 58, Ambrosino 90+6)
After Extra-Time

Semi-Finals

Jun 25 – Bratislava
England 2 (Elliott 63, 86)
Netherlands 1 (Ohio 72)

Jun 25 – Kosice
Germany 3 (Weiper 8, Woltemade 14, Gruda 90+5)
France 0

Final

Jun 28 – Bratislava
England 3 (Elliott 5, Hutchinson 24, Rowe 92)
Germany 2 (Weiper 45+1, Nebel 61)
After Extra-Time

Club Football

WORLD

2025 FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP

Group A

Jun 14 – Miami Gardens
Al Ahly (Egy) 0
Inter Miami (USA) 0

Jun 15 – East Rutherford
Palmeiras (Bra) 0
Porto (Por) 0

Jun 19 – East Rutherford
Palmeiras (Bra) 2 (Abou Ali 49 og, Lopez 59)
Al Ahly (Egy) 0

Jun 19 – Atlanta
Inter Miami (USA) 2 (Segovia 47, Messi 54)
Porto (Por) 1 (Aghehowa 8 pen)

Jun 23 – Miami Gardens
Inter Miami (USA) 2 (Allende 16, Suarez 65)
Palmeiras (Bra) 2 (Paulinho 80, Mauricio 87)

Jun 23 – East Rutherford
Porto (Por) 4 (Mora 23, William Gomes 50, Aghehowa 53, Pepe 89)
Al Ahly (Egy) 4 (Abou Ali 15, 45+2 pen, 51, Ben Romdhane 64)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras (Q)	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Inter Miami (Q)	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Porto	3	0	2	1	5	6	2
Al Ahly	3	0	2	1	4	6	2

Group B

Jun 15 – Pasadena
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 (Fabian 19, Vitinha 45+1, Mayulu 87, Lee Kang-in 90+7 pen)
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 0

Jun 15 – Seattle
Botafogo (Bra) 2 (Jair Cunha 28, Igor Jesus 44)
Seattle Sounders (USA) 1 (C. Roldan 75)

Jun 19 – Seattle
Seattle Sounders (USA) 1 (Rusnak 50)
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 3 (Barrios 11, 55, Witsel 47)

Jun 19 – Pasadena
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 0
Botafogo (Bra) 1 (Igor Jesus 36)

Jun 23 – Seattle
Seattle Sounders (USA) 0
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 2 (Kvaratskhelia 35, Hakimi 66)

Jun 23 – Pasadena
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 1 (Griezmann 87)
Botafogo (Bra) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG (Q)	3	2	0	1	6	1	6
Botafogo (Q)	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Atletico Madrid	3	2	0	1	4	5	6
Seattle Sounders	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Group C

Jun 15 – Cincinnati
Bayern Munich (Ger) 10 (Coman 6, 21, Boey 18, Olise 20, 45+3, Muller 45, 89, Musiala 67, 73 pen, 84)
Auckand City (Nzl) 0

Jun 16 – Miami Gardens
Boca Juniors (Arg) 2 (Otamendi 21 og, Battaglia 27)
Benfica (Por) 2 (Di Maria 45+3 pen, Otamendi 84)

Jun 20 – Orlando
Benfica (Por) 6 (Di Maria 45+8 pen, 90+8 pen, Pavlidis 53, Sanches 63, Barreiro 76, 78)
Auckand City (Nzl) 0

Jun 20 – Miami Gardens
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Kane 18, Olise 84)
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Merentiel 66)

Jun 24 – Nashville
Auckand City (Nzl) 1 (Gray 52)
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Garrow 26 og)

Jun 23 – Charlotte
Benfica (Por) 1 (Schjelderup 13)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica (Q)	3	2	1	0	9	2	7
Bayern Munich (Q)	3	2	0	1	12	2	6
Boca Juniors	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Auckland City	3	0	1	2	1	17	1

Group D

Jun 16 – Atlanta
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Neto 34, Fernandez 79)
LAFC (USA) 0

Jun 16 – Philadelphia
Flamengo (Bra) 2 (De Arrascaeta 17, Luiz Araujo 70)
Esperance (Tun) 0

Jun 20 – Philadelphia
Flamengo (Bra) 3 (Bruno Henrique 62, Danilo 65, Wallace Yan 83)
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Neto 13)

Jun 20 – Nashville
LAFC (USA) 0
Esperance (Tun) 1 (Belaili 70)

Jun 24 – Orlando
LAFC (USA) 1 (Bouanga 84)
Flamengo (Bra) 1 (Wallace Yan 86)

Jun 24 – Philadelphia
Esperance (Tun) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 3 (Adarabioyo 45+3, Delap 45+5, George 90+7)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Chelsea (Q)	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Esperance	3	1	0	2	1	5	3
LAFC	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group E

Jun 17 – Seattle
River Plate (Arg) 3 (Colidio 12, Driussi 48, Meza 73)
Urawa Reds (Jpn) 1 (Matsuo 58 pen)

Jun 17 – Pasadena
Monterrey (Mex) 1 (Ramos 25)
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (L. Martinez 42)

Jun 21 – Seattle
Internazionale (Ita) 2 (L. Martinez 78, Carboni 90+2)
Urawa Reds (Jpn) 1 (Watanabe 11)

Jun 21 – Pasadena
River Plate (Arg) 0
Monterrey (Mex) 0

Jun 25 – Seattle
Internazionale (Ita) 2 (F. Esposito 72, Bastoni 90+3)
River Plate (Arg) 0

Jun 25 – Pasadena
Urawa Reds (Jpn) 0
Monterrey (Mex) 4 (Deossa 30, Berterame 34, 90+7, Corona 39)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Monterrey (Q)	3	1	2	0	5	1	5
River Plate	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Urawa Reds	3	0	0	3	2	9	0

Group F

Jun 17 – East Rutherford
Fluminense (Bra) 0
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 0

Jun 17 – Orlando
Ulsan HD (Kor) 0
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 1 (Rayners 36)

Jun 21 – Cincinnati
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 3 (Ribeiro 11, Rayners 62, Mothiba 90)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 4 (Nmecha 16, Guirassy 34, Bellingham 45, Mudau 59 og)

Jun 21 – East Rutherford
Fluminense (Bra) 4 (Arias 27, Nonato 66, Freytes 83, Keno 90+2)
Ulsan HD (Kor) 2 (Lee Jin-hyun 37, Um Won-sang 45+3)

Jun 25 – Cincinnati
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 1 (Svensson 36)
Ulsan HD (Kor) 0

Jun 25 – Miami Gardens
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 0
Fluminense (Bra) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Dortmund (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Fluminense (Q)	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Mamelodi Sundowns	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Ulsan HD	3	0	0	3	2	6	0

Group G

Jun 18 – Philadelphia
Manchester City (Eng) 2 (Foden 2, Doku 42)
Wydad (Mar) 0

Jun 18 – Washington D.C.
Al Ain (UAE) 0
Juventus (Ita) 5 (Kolo Muani 11, 45+4, Conceicao 21, 58, Yildiz 31)

Jun 22 – Philadelphia
Juventus (Ita) 4 (Boutouil 6 og, Yildiz 16, 69, Vlahovic 90+4 pen)
Wydad (Mar) 1 (Lorch 25)

Jun 22 – Atlanta
Manchester City (Eng) 6 (Gundogan 8, 73, Echeverri 27, Haaland 45+5 pen, Bobb 84, Cherki 89)
Al Ain (UAE) 0

Jun 26 – Orlando
Juventus (Ita) 2 (Koopmeiners 11, Vlahovic 84)
Manchester City (Eng) 5 (Doku 9, Kalulu 26 og, Haaland 52, Foden 69, Savinho 75)

Jun 26 – Washington D.C.
Wydad (Mar) 1 (Mailula 4)
Al Ain (UAE) 2 (Laba 45+1 pen, Kaku 50)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City (Q)	3	3	0	0	13	2	9
Juventus (Q)	3	2	0	1	11	6	6
Al Ain	3	1	0	2	2	12	3
Wydad	3	0	0	3	2	8	0

Group H

Jun 18 – Miami Gardens
Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (G. Garcia 34)
Al Hilal (KSA) 1 (Neves 41 pen)

Jun 18 – Cincinnati
Pachuca (Mex) 1 (Gonzalez 56)
Salzburg (Aut) 2 (Gloukh 42, Onisiwo 76)

Jun 22 – Charlotte
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Bellingham 35, Guler 43, Valverde 70)
Pachuca (Mex) 1 (Montiel 80)

Jun 22 – Washington D.C.
Salzburg (Aut) 0
Al Hilal (KSA) 0

Jun 26 – Nashville
Al Hilal (KSA) 2 (S. Al Dawsari 22, Marcos Leonardo 90+5)
Pachuca (Mex) 0

Jun 26 – Philadelphia
Salzburg (Aut) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Vinicius Junior 40, Valverde 45+3, G. Garcia 84)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Al Hilal (Q)	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Salzburg	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Pachuca	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Last 16

Jun 28 – Philadelphia
Palmeiras (Bra) 1 (Paulinho 100)
Botafogo (Bra) 0
After Extra-Time

Jun 28 – Charlotte
Benfica (Por) 1 (Di Maria 90+5 pen)
Chelsea (Eng) 4 (James 64, Nkunku 108, Neto 114, Dewsbury-Hall 117)
After Extra-Time

Jun 29 – Atlanta
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 (Neves 6, 39, Aviles 44 og, Hakimi 45+3)
Inter Miami (USA) 0

Jun 29 – Miami Gardens
Flamengo (Bra) 2 (Gerson 33, Jorginho 55 pen)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 4 (Pulgar 6 og, Kane 9, 73, Goretzka 41)

Jun 30 – Charlotte
Internazionale (Ita) 0
Fluminense (Bra) 2 (Cano 3, Hercules 90+3)

Jun 30 – Orlando
Manchester City (Eng) 3 (B. Silva 9, Haaland 55, Foden 104)
Al Hilal (KSA) 4 (Marcos Leonardo 46, 112, Malcom 52, Koulibaly 94)
After Extra-Time

Jul 1 – Miami Gardens
Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (G. Garcia 54)
Juventus (Ita) 0

Jul 1 – Atlanta
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 2 (Guirassy 14, 24)
Monterrey (Mex) 1 (Berterame 48)

Quarter-Finals

Jul 4 – Orlando
Fluminense (Bra) 2 (Martinelli 40, Hercules 70)
Al Hilal (KSA) 1 (Marcos Leonardo 51)

Jul 4 – Philadelphia
Palmeiras (Bra) 1 (Estevao 53)
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Palmer 16, Weverton 83 og)

Jul 5 – Atlanta
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 2 (Doue 78, Dembele 90+6)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 0

Jul 5 – East Rutherford
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (G. Garcia 10, F. Garcia 20, Mbappe 90+4)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 2 (Beier 90+3, Guirassy 90+8 pen)

Semi-Finals

Jul 8 – East Rutherford
Fluminense (Bra) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Joao Pedro 18, 56)

Jul 9 – East Rutherford
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 (Fabian 6, 24, Dembele 9, Ramos 87)
Real Madrid (Spa) 0

Final

Jul 13 – East Rutherford
Chelsea (Eng) 3 (Palmer 22, 30, Joao Pedro 43)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 0
Chelsea: Sanchez – Gusto, Chalobah, Colwill, Cucurella; James (Dewsbury-Hall 77), Caicedo; Palmer, Fernandez (Andrey Santos 61), Neto (Nkunku 78); Joao Pedro (Delap 67).
Paris Saint-Germain: Donnarumma – Hakimi (Ramos 73), Marquinhos, Beraldo, Mendes; Neves, Vitinha, Fabian (Zaire-Emery 73); Doue (Mayulu 73), Dembele, Kvaratskhelia (Barcola 58).
Sent off: Neves 85.

EUROPE

2025-26 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

First Qualifying Round

Jul 8-9: KuPS (Fin) 1-0 Milsami Orhei (Mda); The New Saints (Wal) 0-0 Shkendija (Mkd); Iberia 1999 (Geo) 1-3 Malmo (Swe); FCI Levadia (Est) 0-1 RFS (Lva); Drita (Kos) 1-0 Differdange 03 (Lux); Vikingur (Fro) 2-3 Lincoln Red Imps (Gib); Egnatia (Alb) 1-0 Breidablik (Isl); Virtus (Smr) 0-2 Zrinjski Mostar (Bih); Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) 1-1 Kairat (Kaz); Noah (Arm) 1-0 Buducnost Podgorica (Mne); Zalgiris (Ltu) 2-0 Hamrun Spartans (Mlt); Shelbourne (Irl) 1-0 Linfield (Nir); FCSB (Rou) 3-1 Inter Club d'Escaldes (And); Ludogorets (Bul) 1-0 Dinamo Minsk (Blr)

Jul 15-16: Hamrun Spartans (Mlt) 2-0 Zalgiris (Ltu) (agg 2-2, *AET, Hamrun Spartans win 11-10 on pens*); Milsami Orhei (Mda) 0-0 KuPS (Fin) (agg 0-1); Shkendija (Mkd) 2-1 The New Saints (Wal) (agg 2-1, *AET*); Malmo (Swe) 3-1 Iberia 1999 (Geo) (agg 6-2); RFS (Lva) 1-0 FCI Levadia (Est) (agg 2-0); Differdange 03 (Lux) 2-3 Drita (Kos) (agg 2-4); Lincoln Red Imps (Gib) 1-0 Vikingur (Fro) (agg 4-2); Breidablik (Isl) 5-0 Egnatia (Alb) (agg 5-1); Inter Club d'Escaldes (And) 2-1 FCSB (Rou) (agg 3-4); Zrinjski Mostar (Bih) 2-1 Virtus (Smr) (agg 4-1); Kairat (Kaz) 2-0 Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) (agg 3-1); Buducnost Podgorica (Mne) 2-2 Noah (Arm) (agg 2-3); Linfield (Nir) 1-1 Shelbourne (Irl) (agg 1-2); Dinamo Minsk (Blr) 2-2 Ludogorets (Bul) (agg 2-3, *AET*)

2025-26 EUROPA LEAGUE

First Qualifying Round

Jul 10: Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 6-0 Ilves (Fin); Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda) 4-0 Prishtina (Kos); Spartak Trnava (Svk) 0-1 BK Hacken (Swe); Sabah (Aze) 2-3 Celje (Svn); Legia Warsaw (Pol) 1-0 Aktobe (Kaz); Levski Sofia (Bul) 0-0 Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr); AEK Larnaca (Cyp) 1-0 Partizan (Srb); Paks (Hun) 0-0 CFR Cluj (Rou)

Jul 17: Ilves (Fin) 0-0 Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) (agg 0-6); Prishtina (Kos) 2-1 Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda) (agg 2-5); BK Hacken (Swe) 2-2 Spartak Trnava (Svk) (agg 3-2); Celje (Svn) 3-3 Sabah (Aze) (agg 6-5, *AET*); Aktobe (Kaz) 0-1 Legia Warsaw (Pol) (agg 0-2); Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr) 1-1 Levski Sofia (Bul) (agg 1-1, *AET, Levski Sofia win 3-1 on pens*); Partizan (Srb) 2-1 AEK Larnaca (Cyp) (agg 2-2, *AET, AEK Larnaca win 6-5 on pens*); CFR Cluj (Rou) 3-0 Paks (Hun) (agg 3-0)

2025-26 CONFERENCE LEAGUE

First Qualifying Round

Jul 8-10: Floriana (Mlt) 2-1 Haverfordwest County (Wal); St Joseph's (Gib) 2-2 Cliftonville (Nir); NSI (Fro) 4-0 HJK (Fin); Torpedo Kutaisi (Geo) 4-3 Ordabasy (Kaz); Zeljeznicar (Bih) 1-1 Koper (Svn); SJK (Fin) 1-2 KI (Fro); Nomme Kalju (Est) 1-1 Partizani (Alb); Tre Fiori (Smr) 1-0 Pyunik (Arm); St Patrick's Athletic (Irl) 1-0 Hegelmann (Ltu); Decic (Mne) 2-0 Sileks (Mke); Sutjeska (Mne) 1-2 Dynamo Brest (Blr); Larne (Nir) 0-0 Auda (Lva); Torpedo-BelAZ Zhodino (Blr) 3-0 Rabotnicki (Mkd); FCB Magpies (Gib) 2-3 Paide Linnameeskond (Est); Birkirkara (Mlt) 1-0 Petrocub Hincesti (Mda); Atletic Club d'Escaldes (And) 2-0 F91 Dudelange (Lux); Valur (Isl) 3-0 Flora (Est); Malisheva (Kos) 0-1 Vekingur (Isl); Racing Union (Lux) 1-2 Dila Gori (Geo); Vllaznia (Alb) 0-1 Daugavpils (Lva); Urartu (Arm) 1-2 Neman Grodno (Blr); Vardar (Mkd) 3-0 La Fiorita (Smr); Kauno Zalgiris (Ltu) 3-0 Penybont (Wal); Borac Banja Luka (Bih) 1-4 Santa Coloma (And)

Jul 16-17: Auda (Lva) 2-2 Larne (Nir) (agg 2-2, *AET, Larne win 4-2 on pens*); Haverfordwest County (Wal) 2-3 Floriana (Mlt) (agg 3-5); Cliftonville (Nir) 2-3 St Joseph's (Gib) (agg 4-5, *AET*); HJK (Fin) 5-0 NSI (Fro) (agg 5-4, *AET*); Ordabasy (Kaz) 1-1 Torpedo Kutaisi (Geo) (agg 4-5); Koper (Svn) 3-1 Zeljeznicar (Bih) (agg 4-2); KI (Fro) 2-0 SJK (Fin) (agg 4-1); Partizani (Alb) 0-1 Nomme Kalju (Est) (agg 1-2, *AET*); Pyunik (Arm) 5-0 Tre Fiori (Smr) (agg 5-1); Hegelmann (Ltu) 0-2 St Patrick's Athletic (Irl) (agg 0-3); Sileks (Mke) 2-1 Decic (Mne) (agg 2-3); Dynamo Brest (Blr) 0-2 Sutjeska (Mne) (agg 2-3); Rabotnicki (Mkd) 0-1 Torpedo-BelAZ Zhodino (Blr) (agg 0-4); Paide Linnameeskond (Est) 4-1 FCB Magpies (Gib) (agg 7-3); Petrocub Hincesti (Mda) 3-0 Birkirkara (Mlt) (agg 3-1); F91 Dudelange (Lux) 2-3 Atletic Club d'Escaldes (And) (agg 2-5); Flora (Est) 1-2 Valur (Isl) (agg 1-5); Vekingur (Isl) 8-0 Malisheva (Kos) (agg 9-0); Dila Gori (Geo) 1-0 Racing Union (Lux) (agg 3-1); Daugavpils (Lva) 2-4 Vllaznia (Alb) (agg 3-4); Neman Grodno (Blr) 4-0 Urartu (Arm) (agg 6-1); La Fiorita (Smr) 2-2 Vardar (Mkd) (agg 2-5); Penybont (Wal) 1-1 Kauno Zalgiris (Ltu) (agg 1-4); Santa Coloma (And) 0-2 Borac Banja Luka (Bih) (agg 4-3)

SOUTH AMERICA

2025 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Knockout Round Play-Offs – 1st Leg

Jul 15 – Salvador
Bahia (Bra) 0
America de Cali (Col) 0

Jul 15 – Quito
Independiente del Valle (Ecu) 4 (Carabajal 45+3, Mercado 49, 82, Spinelli 51)
Vasco da Gama (Bra) 0

Jul 15 – Santiago del Estero
Central Cordoba (Arg) 0
Cerro Largo (Uru) 0

Jul 16 – Lima
Alianza Lima (Per) 2 (Gentile 58, E. Castillo 61)
Gremio (Bra) 0

Jul 16 – Cochabamba
San Antonio Bulo Bulo (Bol) 0
Once Caldas (Col) 3 (Zapata 50, Moreno 85, Gomez 88)

Jul 16 – La Paz
Bolivar (Bol) 3 (Robson Matheus 58, Cauteruccio 90+10 pen, Melgar 90+13)
Palestino (Chi) 0

Jul 17 – Bucuramanga
Atletico Bucaramanga (Col) 0
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 1 (Hulk 68 pen)

Jul 17 – Santiago
Universidad de Chile (Chi) 5 (Aranguiz 22 pen, Altamirano 57, Assadi 60, Hormazabal 65, Guerra 87)
Guarani (Par) 0

Final Tables 2025

COLOMBIA

Apertura First Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America de Cali*	20	11	6	3	29	12	39
Millonarios*	20	11	5	4	30	17	38
Junior*	20	10	7	3	26	16	37
Tolima*	20	10	6	4	30	19	36
Atletico Nacional*	20	10	5	5	37	21	35
Santa Fe*	20	9	6	5	28	23	33
Once Caldas*	20	10	3	7	26	22	33
Ind Medellin*	20	8	8	4	19	11	32
Atl Bucaramanga	20	8	5	7	24	20	29
Alianza	20	8	5	7	23	21	29
Deportivo Pasto	20	8	5	7	20	20	29
Deportivo Pereira	20	7	7	6	22	21	28
Deportivo Cali	20	5	9	6	14	17	24
Aguilas Doradas	20	4	9	7	17	19	21
Llaneros	20	6	2	12	20	28	20
Fortaleza	20	5	5	10	15	25	20
Boyaca Chico	20	4	8	8	14	31	20
Envigado	20	5	3	12	16	29	18
Magdalena	20	1	8	11	14	30	11
La Equidad	20	2	4	14	13	35	10

*Advance to next round

Semi-Final Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Medellin*	6	4	2	0	9	4	14
America de Cali	6	2	3	1	7	7	9
Tolima	6	2	2	2	9	8	8
Junior	6	0	1	5	2	8	1

*Advance to championship play-off

Semi-Final Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santa Fe* (C)	6	4	0	2	8	6	12
Millonarios	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Atletico Nacional	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
Once Caldas	6	0	3	3	4	7	3

*Advance to championship play-off

Final – 1st Leg

Jun 24 – Bogota
Santa Fe 0
Independiente Medellin 0

Final – 2nd Leg

Jun 29 – Medellin
Independiente Medellin 1 (Fydriszewski 18)
Santa Fe 2 (S. Mosquera 31, Rodallega 79)
Santa Fe win 2-1 on aggregate

PERU

Apertura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitario*	18	12	3	3	38	12	39
Alianza Lima	18	11	4	3	23	11	37
Cusco	18	10	4	4	34	20	34
Alianza Atletico	18	11	1	6	28	18	34
Sporting Cristal	18	10	2	6	31	24	32
Melgar	18	8	7	3	28	20	31
Sport Huancayo	18	9	3	6	23	21	30
Deportivo Garcilaso	18	8	3	7	28	19	27
ADT	18	6	6	6	24	30	24
Cienciano	18	5	8	5	29	25	23
Los Chankas	18	5	8	5	24	25	23
Atletico Grau	18	5	7	6	23	24	22
Sport Boys	18	5	5	8	26	28	20
Juan Pablo II College	18	5	4	9	20	28	19
UTC	18	5	4	9	17	34	19
Binacional	18	4	6	8	20	33	18
Ayacucho	18	4	3	11	14	27	15
Comerciantes Unidos	18	2	5	11	17	31	11
Alianza Universidad	18	2	5	11	16	33	11

*Advance to championship play-off

URUGUAY

Intermedio Serie A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol*	7	5	1	1	15	5	16
Defensor Sporting	7	4	2	1	12	10	14
Montevideo Wanderers	7	3	3	1	6	5	12
Plaza Colonia	7	1	5	1	6	7	8
Liverpool	7	2	2	3	10	12	8
Cerro	7	2	2	3	7	9	8
River Plate	7	1	2	4	6	10	5
Cerro Largo	7	0	3	4	7	11	3

*Advance to final

Intermedio Serie B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional*	7	7	0	0	16	6	21
Juventud	7	5	0	2	14	11	15
Racing	7	4	1	2	11	6	13
Danubio	7	3	1	3	11	11	10
Boston River	7	2	1	4	8	12	7
Progreso	7	2	0	5	4	10	6
Montevideo City Torque	7	1	2	4	10	12	5
Miramar Misiones	7	1	1	5	2	8	4

*Advance to final

Final

Jul 6 – Montevideo
Penarol 0
Nacional 0
After Extra-Time, Penarol win 5-3 on pens

CONCACAF

2025 CANADIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Quarter-Finals

May 20-21:
Forge 1-0 CF Montreal; Valour 2-2 Vancouver Whitecaps; Vancouver FC 1-1 Cavalry
Jun 11: Atletico Ottawa 2-1 York United
Jul 8-9:
Cavalry 1-1 Vancouver FC (agg 2-2, *Vancouver FC win 5-4 on pens*); York United 3-4 Atletico Ottawa (agg 4-6); Vancouver Whitecaps 2-1 Valour (agg 4-3); CF Montreal 2-2 Forge (agg 2-3)

Final Tables 2025

ANGUILLA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roaring Lions (C)	18	16	1	1	86	8	49
Attackers	18	15	1	2	66	19	46
Doc's United	18	14	3	1	67	12	45
Uprising	18	10	3	5	43	30	33
Eagle Claw	18	6	1	11	25	58	19
Spartans	18	4	4	10	18	42	16
Diamond	18	4	2	12	20	52	14
Lymers	18	4	2	12	15	51	14
West End Predators	18	4	1	13	26	82	13
East Enders	18	3	2	13	13	25	11

FRENCH GUIANA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sinnamary (C)	16	14	1	1	55	11	59
Etoile de Matoury	16	13	1	2	38	13	56
Karib	16	11	1	4	34	21	50
Le Geldar	16	10	1	5	41	24	47
Agouado	16	9	3	4	39	22	46
Remire	16	9	0	7	35	28	43
Matoury	16	7	4	5	29	21	41
Olympique de Cayenne	16	7	2	7	37	22	39
Cayenne	16	6	1	9	22	35	35
Grand-Santi	16	5	2	9	24	24	33
Saint-Georges	16	5	2	9	24	41	33
Loyola	16	3	3	10	19	28	28
Kouroucien (R)	16	1	1	14	6	50	20
Montsinery-Tonnegrande (R)	16	1	0	15	11	74	19

Win = 4 points, Draw = 2 points, Loss =1 point

SURINAME

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Robinhood*	18	12	6	0	49	16	42
Transvaal*	18	11	4	3	26	10	37
Voorwaarts**	18	11	1	6	32	20	34
Notch**	18	9	5	4	29	25	32
PVV**	18	9	4	5	36	19	31
Inter Moengotapoe** (C)	18	8	6	4	36	26	30
FC Inter Wanica	18	4	4	10	17	39	13
Leo Victor	18	3	4	11	17	27	13
Flora	18	3	2	13	23	45	11
Broki	18	2	0	16	17	55	6

*Advance to semi-finals
**Advance to quarter-finals

Quarter-Finals

Jun 29-30: Notch 1-4 PVV; Voorwaarts 0-3 Inter Moengotapoe
Jul 3-4: PVV 1-1 Notch (agg 5-2); Inter Moengotapoe 2-0 Voorwaarts (agg 5-0)

Semi-Finals

Jul 6-7: Robinhood 1-1 PVV; Transvaal 1-2 Inter Moengotapoe
Jul 9: Inter Moengotapoe 0-1 Transvaal (agg 2-2, *Inter Moengotapoe win 5-4 on pens*); PVV 0-0 Robinhood (agg 1-1, *PVV win 5-4 on pens*)

Third Place Play-Off

Jul 12: Robinhood 4-0 Transvaal

Final

Jul 13: PVV 1-2 Inter Moengotapoe

ASIA

Final Tables 2024-25

IRAQ

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shorta (C)	38	26	9	3	75	23	87
Al Zawra'a	38	23	8	7	56	28	77
Zakho	38	20	11	7	57	25	71
Al Talaba	38	18	9	11	40	27	63
Al Quwa Al Jawiya	38	17	9	12	51	43	60
Al Naft	38	15	14	9	32	27	59
Duhok	38	16	9	13	47	41	57
Al Karma	38	15	11	12	43	35	56
Newroz	38	14	11	13	46	41	53
Al-Qasim	38	13	13	12	43	43	52
Naft Maysan	38	14	9	15	42	46	51
Erbil	38	15	5	18	49	61	50
Al Kahrabaa	38	12	13	13	39	41	49
Al Karkh	38	12	10	16	40	49	46

Al Najaf	38	11	13	14	37	36	46
Al Minaa	38	11	10	17	39	44	43
Diyala	38	10	11	17	31	50	41
Naft Al Basra* (R)	38	8	9	21	32	57	33
Al Hudood (R)	38	8	2	28	37	79	26
Karbala (R)	38	4	10	24	26	66	22

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off

Promotion-Relegation Play-Off

Jul 14: Amanat Baghdad 1-0 Naft Al Basra

LEBANON

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ansar	11	10	1	0	31	7	31
Safa	11	9	2	0	30	4	29
Al Ahed	11	9	1	1	34	11	28
Nejmeh	11	5	2	4	12	8	17
Sagesse	11	4	4	3	12	11	16
Tadamon Sour	11	4	2	5	13	14	14
Shabab Al Sahel	11	4	1	6	14	21	13
Racing Beirut	11	1	6	4	4	14	9
Riyadi Abbasiyah	11	1	5	5	7	15	8
Bourj	11	2	1	8	7	21	7
Chabab Ghazieh	11	1	3	7	5	18	6
Shabab Baalbek	11	1	2	8	4	29	5

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom six enter relegation round with points obtained during regular season halved and rounded up*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ansar (C)	26	20	3	3	58	15	48
Safa	26	18	6	2	59	19	46
Al Ahed	26	14	5	7	55	34	33
Nejmeh	26	11	7	8	41	30	32
Sagesse	26	8	6	12	28	37	22
Tadamon Sour	26	5	5	16	23	52	13

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bourj	26	13	3	10	30	32	39
Shabab Al Sahel	26	12	3	11	44	41	33
Riyadi Abbasiyah	26	7	10	9	32	27	27
Racing Beirut	26	8	7	11	24	39	27
Shabab Baalbek (R)	26	4	6	16	17	55	16
Chabab Ghazieh (R)	26	2	7	17	19	49	10

SYRIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Karamah*	11	7	3	1	15	8	24
Al Ittihad Ahli**	11	7	2	2	20	8	23
Al Wahda***	11	7	1	3	17	11	22
Hutteen****	11	5	5	1	13	6	20
Al Wathba	11	6	2	3	12	9	20
Al Taliya	11	4	3	4	12	10	15
Al Fotuwa	11	3	3	5	12	17	12
Tishreen	11	2	5	4	8	12	11
Al Jaish	11	2	3	6	13	17	9
Al Shouleh	11	1	5	5	7	14	8
Jableh	11	1	5	5	11	18	8
Al Shorta	11	1	3	7	6	16	6

*Carry over 4 points to championship round
**Carry over 3 points to championship round
***Carry over 2 points to championship round
****Carry over 1 point to championship round

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad Ahli (C)	3	2	0	1	5	2	9
Al Karamah	3	1	0	2	5	5	7
Hutteen	3	2	0	1	4	3	7
Al Wahda	3	1	0	2	4	8	5

AFRICA

Final Tables 2024-25

CAMEROON

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colombe Sportive (C)	30	19	8	3	41	15	65
Panthere	30	16	7	7	36	23	55
Gazelle	30	15	8	7	52	32	53
Coton Sport	30	14	10	6	40	29	52
Stade Renard	30	13	7	10	36	27	46
Victoria United	30	12	6	12	46	49	42
Canon Yaounde	30	11	8	11	35	30	41
PWD Bamenda	30	8	15	7	33	31	39
Aigle Royal	30	11	6	13	30	30	39
Fauve Azur	30	11	6	13	29	27	39
Dynamo Douala	30	10	8	12	31	33	38
Fortuna Mfou	30	10	7	13	35	36	37
Bamboutos (R)	30	10	9	11	27	29	36
Les Astres (R)	30	10	5	15	31	42	35
Union Sportive (R)	30	5	7	18	17	46	22
YOSA (R)	30	3	7	20	15	55	16

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AS Tempete MOCAF (C)	20	14	5	1	37	13	47
FC FDS	20	12	4	4	27	19	40
Olympique Real de Bangui	20	10	6	4	34	22	36
DFC du 8eme Arrondissement	19	10	5	4	26	14	35
Club Red Star de Bangui	20	7	7	6	30	22	28
Les Anges de Fatima	19	7	4	8	24	27	25
SOS Pius Njawe	20	6	5	9	28	24	23
Stade Centrafricain	19	6	5	8	27	25	23
TP USCA	20	5	7	8	25	26	22
AS Gbangre Sport	20	2	4	14	16	48	10
EFC du 5eme Arrondissement (R)	19	2	2	15	11	45	8
AS Douane (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

COMOROS

Ngazidja Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilimadjou*	22	12	7	3	38	17	43
Djabal	22	11	9	2	34	16	42
Atomic Ngome	22	12	5	5	33	17	41
Volcan Club	22	8	6	8	31	26	30
Hantsindzi	22	7	7	8	29	32	28
Alize Fort	22	8	4	10	19	27	28
Etoile des Comores	22	6	8	8	15	22	26
Amical Club	22	6	7	9	17	23	25
Male (R)	22	5	10	7	25	26	25
Mbeni (R)	22	6	7	9	25	31	25
N'Gaya (R)	22	5	8	9	25	36	23
Coin Nord (R)	22	5	4	13	21	39	19

*Advance to national group

Mwali Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fomboni*	14	9	3	2	21	10	30
Belle Lumiere	14	6	5	3	19	16	23
Nouvel Espoir	14	7	2	5	15	14	23
Etoile du Centre	14	6	3	5	28	15	21
Ouragan Club	14	4	6	4	13	17	18
Wemani Espoir	14	3	6	5	13	22	15
Mbatse Club (R)	14	2	5	7	18	22	11
Coca Bole (R)	14	2	4	8	13	24	10

*Advance to national group

Ndzuani Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Djomakawe*	18	11	3	4	24	12	36
Gombessa Sport	18	9	4	5	30	16	31
Ngazi Sport	18	9	3	6	21	17	30
Mrango Club	18	8	4	6	21	18	28
Komorozine	18	7	7	4	15	14	28
Steal Nouvel	18	7	4	7	18	15	25
Etoile d'Or	18	7	4	7	21	19	25
Beresse	18	6	6	6	25	23	24
Bambao M'tsamga (R)	18	3	4	11	10	37	13
Ouani (R)	18	3	1	14	16	30	10

*Advance to national group

National Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilimadjou (C)	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Djomakawe	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Fomboni	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

GAMBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Banjul (C)	30	17	9	4	52	23	60
Fortune	30	16	4	10	39	27	52
Falcons	30	13	9	8	27	23	48
BST Galaxy	30	12	9	9	32	26	45
Bombada	30	10	13	7	33	26	43
Brikama United	30	8	16	6	29	26	40
Steve Biko	30	8	16	6	20	22	40
Hart Academy	30	10	10	10	30	28	40
Hawks	30	9	12	9	30	32	39
TMT	30	7	16	7	23	27	37
Dutch Lions	30	8	11	11	27	36	35
Team Rhino	30	8	10	12	27	31	34
Greater Tomorrow	30	7	11	12	19	35	32
Armed Forces*	30	8	7	15	26	34	31
Banjul United (R)	30	5	13	12	19	26	28
Marimoo (R)	30	3	16	11	17	28	25

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off

GUINEA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Horoya (C)	26	16	7	3	40	13	55
Hafia	26	12	9	5	36	18	45
Renaissance FC	26	11	10	5	26	17	43
Ashanti Golden Boys	26	11	7	8	28	24	40
Renaissance Caiman Club	26	8	12	6	29	24	36
CI Kamsar	26	9	8	9	33	29	35
Milo	26	9	7	10	40	34	34
Wakirya	26	8	8	10	32	35	32
Kaloum	26	9	5	12	23	29	32
Mineurs de Sangaredi	26	8	8	10	20	28	32
Loubha	26	8	7	11	24	30	31
Guinee Foot Elite	26	7	10	9	28	40	31
Flamme Olympique (R)	26	6	12	8	22	24	30
Acadmie SOAR (R)	26	3	4	19	14	50	13

MADAGASCAR

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fosa Juniors*	11	8	2	1	16	4	26
Fanalamanga*	11	8	1	2	14	4	25
Disciples*	11	7	2	2	15	6	23
Elgeco Plus* (C)	11	5	5	1	14	8	20
Ajesaia*	11	4	5	2	16	10	17
COSFA*	11	5	2	4	20	15	17
CFFA*	11	4	2	5	15	13	14
Mama*	11	2	4	5	8	11	10
Inate Rouge	11	2	4	5	13	17	10
USCAFOOT	11	2	3	6	8	2	9
Avenir Sainte-Anne	11	1	3	7	10	20	6
Tsaramandroso Formation	11	0	3	8	6	35	3

*Advance to finals stage

Quarter-Finals

May 16-17: Mama 1-1 Fosa Juniors; Ajesaia 0-1 Elgeco Plus; COSFA 2-0 Disciples; CFFA 1-0 Fanalamanga
May 30-31: Elgeco Plus 0-0 Ajesaia (agg 1-0); Disciples 0-0 COSFA (agg 0-2); Fosa Juniors 1-1 Mama (agg 2-2, *Mama win 4-2 on pens*); Fanalamanga 1-0 CFFA (agg 1-1, *CFFA win 9-8 on pens*)

Semi-Finals

Jun 19:
CFFA 2-4 COSFA; Mama 0-3 Elgeco Plus
Jul 10: COSFA 1-2 CFFA (agg 5-4); Elgeco Plus 2-3 Mama (agg 5-3)

Final

Jul 13: Elgeco Plus 3-0 COSFA

NIGER

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ASFAN (C)	30	16	9	5	48	20	57
Douanes Niamey	30	16	9	5	46	20	57
ASGNN	30	16	6	8	34	21	54
Police	30	14	8	8	33	23	50
US Gendarmerie	30	13	10	7	40	26	49
Nigelec	30	13	9	8	38	22	48
Espoir	30	13	6	11	29	26	45
Olympic Niamey	30	11	7	12	34	38	40
Sahel	30	10	9	11	22	25	39
Urana	30	8	14	8	21	24	38
AS UAM	30	8	11	11	26	35	35
Liberte	30	8	10	12	28	37	34
Renaissance	30	7	10	13	23	33	31
Tahoua	30	8	5	17	24	44	29
Wombeye	30	5	8	17	24	49	23
Jangorzo (R)	30	5	7	18	17	44	22

SENEGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jaraaf (C)	30	15	9	6	36	19	54
Goree	30	14	9	7	27	19	51
Academie Generation Foot	30	12	10	8	36	28	46
Ouakam	30	11	13	6	27	19	46
Wally Daan	30	10	12	8	21	19	42
AJEL de Rufisque	30	10	12	8	25	24	42
La Linguere	30	9	13	8	29	29	40
Dakar Sacre-Coeur	30	10	9	11	30	29	39
Pikine	30	9	12	9	19	21	39
Guediawaye	30	8	14	8	28	30	38
Teungueth	30	8	12	10	26	23	36
Casa Sports	30	7	13	10	19	22	34
Sonacos	30	7	11	12	20	26	32
HLM Nationale	30	6	13	11	20	29	31
Oslo (R)	30	8	7	15	25	41	31
Jamono Fatick (R)	30	6	11	13	25	35	29

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